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[POPPIE RAISED GUY'S HAND, AND PRESSED IT TO HER LIPS WITH CHILDISH GRACE.]

GUY FORRESTER'S SECRET.

CHAPTER VII.

LITTLE Lady Dorothea was none the worse for her exposure to the storm, but as much could not be said for her governess. For days Poppie did not leave her room, and when she at last emerged from her retirement, and joined in her daily routine of family life at the Castle, Lady Munro noticed a great change in her favourite.

"I can't make it out," she said one evening to Mr. Forrester, when some chance remark had sent the blushes to the girl's face, and made her precipitately leave the room, "she used to be the merriest little creature."

Guy looked thoughtful.

"She never struck me as merry."

"Ah! but you have only seen her since her illness. Now, I assure you when she first came to us she was the light of the house."

Sir Ira Vernon had entered the room suddenly, and caught the last words.

"Are you speaking of Miss Smith?" he inquired, rather gracefully.

"Yes, and wondering what has come to her. She seems like a startled deer; the least thing frightens her."

Fairlawn was quite ready for its master, but still he lingered at Ardmore Castle, breaking through their retirement; the Earl and Countess had given more than one dinner-party in his honour. He had now been a month their guest, and showed not the least sign of taking his departure. It was flattering to his hosts, but yet she would gladly have bidden him farewell, for she had never lost the presentiment experienced on his first arrival; she still unconsciously feared the handsome, fascinating young baronet.

"I think she has something on her mind," said Ira, looking full into Lady Munro's face, and speaking with slow, marked emphasis; "I have thought so all along."

Guy Forrester darted an indignant glance at his friend, and began an eager denial; but it was checked on his lips by the recollection that with his miserable secret his partizan-

ship could bring naught but misery to the girl he loved.

It had come to that. Guy, who had believed Mrs. Jenkins's treachery had sealed his heart for ever from a second attachment—Guy, who had resisted the most ardent attempts of Sir Joshua and Lady Marton to provide him with a bride—Guy, who had run the gauntlet of the fascination of all the beauties of Maryland—Guy was hopelessly, recklessly in love with a small brown-eyed girl, about whom he knew absolutely nothing, save that she was an orphan, and possessed an enemy.

"I am sure you are mistaken," said the Countess, hastily; "Poppie is the last girl in the world to have a secret; she is as open as the day. Besides, if any private trouble oppressed her, it must have been in existence when she first came to us; and I assure you, then, she was as light-hearted and merry as a child!"

Ira shrugged his shoulders and left the room; the Countess turned to her nephew.

"Guy," she said, calling him by his name at his own request, "have you any idea how much longer he is going to stay?"

Guy started.

"I never thought about it. I fancied, like myself, he had taken advantage of your kindness and lingered on."

"I hope you will linger on for years," said Lady Munro, kindly. "It is delightful to have you; it makes one feel"—here she lowered her voice—"as though you had forgiven me for my share in your past troubles."

"There was nothing to forgive, and it is a real pleasure to me to be here. I confess Ira's long sojourn has puzzled me; but I always imagined, like myself, he loitered on because he was thoroughly at home."

"I don't like him, Guy."

Guy laughed.

"How has he offended you?"

"I don't know."

"My uncle is delighted with him. He is ambitious and high-spirited, with a real genius for politics. I have often thought lately it is a pity he is not in my place; he would have been a heir after my uncle's heart."

Lady Munro trembled.

"Heaven forbid!"

"My dear aunt," said Guy, really surprised at her vehemence, "don't be alarmed, nothing in the world can change Vernon into a Forrester; but I confess I cannot understand your dislike to him!"

"And I cannot explain it, Guy; only I shall be as one freed from a heavy care when I see him leave Ardmore."

"I am really astonished he does not go; but be easy. Christmas will soon be here, and he must do the honours of Fairlawn then."

"If your uncle does not press him to stay here, I can't understand Lord Munro, Guy; he seems positively fascinated with Sir Ira Vernon."

"He knows his father."

"He knew your father," retorted the Countess, "and, of course, in his heart you are ten times closer to him than this hateful haughty, yet you could not resist his sound, and moved your finger as Sir Ira does."

Guy's face changed.

"Then you have noticed it, too? I had thought it was my fancy, but it seemed to me Sir Ira's influence over my uncle was something remarkable."

Meanwhile the subject of their discussion had gone upstairs, but he did not turn in the direction of his own apartment; instead he went through the picture gallery, and without the ceremony of knocking for permission opened a door beyond. If any inquisitive person had demanded his business there, Sir Ira would have replied with the most charming frankness he had to write a German letter, and his knowledge of the language being scanty he had come to the schoolroom in search of a dictionary.

But arrived there he did not direct his attention to the book-shelves. He closed the door after him with scrupulous care, and then advanced towards a little figure dressed in black, whose fair head leant back wearily against the cushions of a large easy chair.

"Poppie!"

"My name is Smith," remarked the girl, coldly; "be good enough to remember that, if you please, Sir Ira."

"I prefer Poppie," returned Sir Ira, coolly, fixing his eyes on the sweet girl's face, "it suits you a great deal better; besides, I have strong doubts of your name being Smith at all."

He watched her with cruel eagerness; it was a random shot, but even he was not prepared for its effect.

Every trace of colour faded from the girl's cheek; for one instant he thought she was about to faint, then by a strong effort she collected her self-command.

"Why will you persecute me so?" she cried, her eyes full of a dumb passionate reproach. "What have I done that you should strive to make my life a weariness to me? You are rich and great, the pet eligible of our county; you can have friends, flatterers, lovers. I am only a poor little governess,

who never sought to do you any harm! Why can't you be merciful and leave me alone?"

"Few women would call my attentions persecutions. I believe every girl in the county would feel flattered by them."

"Then go to them. Go to those other girls, the ladies of your world, and leave me to my humble state."

"But I don't want to," said Ira, almost naively. "The moment I saw you I loved you, and I don't mean to let you go."

"It is so long ago," said Poppie, feebly, "and I had forgotten all about it."

"But I had not. I remember every incident of our meeting. It was in a train, and you had your maid with you. You had lost your purse and were not too proud to accept a loan from me."

"Of nineness," retorted Poppie, bitterly; "the first-class fare from the Crystal Palace where the train started."

"Precisely. The night was raw and cold, and the maid went on a wild-goose chase for you. I waited till it came. You were velvet and furs then; you had every sign of wealth. You laughed when I asked how much there was in your purse and said 'a few pounds,' as though you were too rich to care. Just a year later I find you a friendless little governess, and I want an explanation."

"I can give you none."

"Do you know I haunted that railway station, thinking days afterwards I hung about questioning the porters and describing you minutely, but I never obtained the slightest clue to your whereabouts?"

"I should think not," said Poppie, wistfully. "We never used that station at all. I only got out there that particular night because I knew the carriage would be waiting for me at our own station, and I thought you would find out who I was."

"Then you own there was some mystery in your life even then."

"If you can call it a mystery. I was under the care of a friend who had the greatest possible objection to my making any masculine acquaintances."

"Indeed!"

"It is quite true." "Perhaps this 'friend' was ready to develop into something else, and intended to marry you if you obeyed him."

"The friend was—a woman."

"And you expect me to believe it?"

"It is the truth."

Ira glanced at her savagely; his eye had in it all the anger of rejected love.

"Don't you know," he asked, passionately, "that I could make you a great lady? That after the Countess of Munro my wife will be the leader of local society? Child, why won't you see your own interest, and instead of a poor little governess become Lady Vernon of Fairlawn?"

"I can't."

"Meaning you won't?"

"Well, then, I won't. You have persecuted me to such an extent that I should be very rash were I to trust my life's happiness to you."

His manner changed.

"You have only seen the dark side of me," he urged. "If only you would be my wife I should show you nothing but love and tenderness. Poppie, why won't you believe me?"

"Why won't you believe me?" retorted the girl, "when I tell you nothing in the world will ever make me change my mind. I am sure I am sorry you should care for me, but after all there are plenty of other girls in the world, and with all the advantages you have to offer you won't find much difficulty in winning one of them."

"I only want you."

"And you can't have me." "You absolutely prefer slaving on here in a dependent position, a mere paid servant, to becoming Lady Vernon of Fairlawn? I don't believe it!"

"You are the first person here who has called me a 'paid servant.' If such is your

opinion of me I wonder you foist your society upon me."

"Do you know the consequences if you drive me desperate?"

"Perfectly."

"And they are?"

"You will marry someone else, and Fairlawn, the town house, family jewels, heirlooms (Poppie ticked all these off, one by one, on her fingers as though she were making a mental calculation), and all the other good things you are so fond of talking about would be hers and not mine. You think it would make me sorry, but I should be glad."

"These are not the consequences I meant at all," was the unaffected reply.

"Ardmore would probably suffer the loss of your presence," said Poppie, wickedly, "but you see the Countess managed to exist without you for a long time, and so possibly it would again."

"It would probably have to exist without you, I am thinking."

"Oh, no! The Earl and Countess esteem you very highly, but I don't believe they would carry their friendship to the point of dismissing their governess because she could not appreciate you as you—deserved."

"If I were Lord Munro the truth you would not be another day in his house."

Again that awful fading of her colour, again that ghastly approach in her eyes. Poppie's face betrayed her. There was a turned-down page in her life, and the cruel doubt in Ira's mind, which had hitherto been only a vague, jealous suspicion, deepened into grim certainty as he watched her tell-tale countenance.

"Do not drive me desperate, Poppie? Do not force me to tell the Earl?"

"To tell him what?"

"That his daughter's governess is a fraud, and a despicable—a living lie!"

He had gone too far. She started up, indignation giving her cheeks a vivid crimson. Never had she looked more beautiful, never had Vernon loved her more passionately, and yet not one word of compassion for her touched his heart.

"You must change," he said, hoarsely, "you must leave this very night. Shall I be your adoring lover or your reluctant foe? No middle course is possible, Poppie; to me you must be all in all or nothing."

"And if I tell you do your worst? If I defy you what tale shall you carry to the Earl?"

He looked at her steadily.

"If I refuse to answer?"

"You must answer. You say I am to make my free choice. Unless I know the details of the alternative I cannot."

She had risen and stood confronting him, her small hands looked nervously together, her bosom panting, her eyes full of an intense anxiety; for the very first time Ira began to think he had succeeded in arousing her fear.

"I should tell him that you were not Miss Smith; or, at any rate, not the Miss Smith he believed you, for I could prove to him that at the very time when, according to Mrs. Disney's letter you were engaged in educating her children, I met you roaming about London—the suburbs, if you wish me to be exact—attended by a person styled your maid, and with a private carriage at your orders."

"And is that all?"

"All!" exclaimed Vernon, angrily. "Isn't it enough? Don't you know that for a governess to produce a stolen reference is like a servant giving a false character, and punishable with hard labour?"

Poppie looked at her pretty little hands.

"I don't think they would get through very much work," she said, half to herself; then to her companion, "And in that all, Sir Ira?"

"No!" and his very face grew black as he noted the mocking accent of her tone. "It is not all. I don't suppose Lord Munro would carry the matter to a police court for the credit of his house, in which you have been

received as an equal. He would probably let you escape punishment."

"And keep me here."

"Keep you here! He would expel you from his house at once without suffering you to bid farewell to his innocent wife and daughter. You would never be able to enter another family as governess. All honest occupation would be denied you since you could produce no references. You would be alone in the world, to starve or perish as you could. No one of any respectability would speak to you; you would be a social outcast."

"And you love me?"

"Passionately."

"Then Heaven preserve me from such love!" cried Poppie. "What can it be worth if it seeks to draw upon its object a doom such as you have described."

"You don't understand."

"I understand too well."

"You don't. I am not seeking to draw such a fate upon you. I want to save you from it. I long to have the right of protecting you from all sorrow, and making your happiness my care."

"You would marry me," breathed the girl, slowly; "you would give me your name, and yet you believe me to be an adventuress."

"I don't believe it. I think you are a romantic, imaginative girl, who has enjoyed a harmless deception; but I shall make it my business to see that Lord and Lady Munro view your conduct in its worst light if you drive me to extremities."

"And will it make you happier?"

"What?"

"Will it make you happier to know I am sent away in disgrace? Will it be a pleasure to you to think of me as poor and friendless, with all honest work—I quote your own words—denied me? Will it sweeten your rest at night to feel I may be—your own words again—homeless and starving?"

"At least I shall never have to see you another's, never have to look on and see another win the love denied me."

"You have a strange idea of love," said Poppie, slowly. "I never believed in it. I used to think it a harmless delusion, but I don't think I could ever have held such a degraded idea of it as you do."

Vernon half quailed beneath the contempt flashing from her eyes. Then he recovered himself, and said, slowly,—

"I give you three days to consider my proposal and make your choice."

"I do not need them. My choice is made."

"I repeat I give you three days. This is Tuesday. I will come to you on Friday for your decision."

He would have taken her hand in farewell, but she drew it resolutely away, as though there was contamination in his very touch.

"Good-night, Poppie."

No answer.

"Good-night."

But Miss Smith had taken a volume of Schiller from the shelves, and seemed engrossed in the perusal of a German tragedy. It was hopeless to attempt to extract a word from her, and Ira left the room without discovering she held the volume upside down, and that even had she changed it to its correct position the unshed tears with which her eyes were heavy would have prevented her from reading a single line.

As his footsteps died away Poppie rose, and, shooting the bolt of the door to secure herself from all intrusion, she gave way to a burst of grief, and flung herself into the low chair by the fire, weeping as though her very heart would break.

"And this is what people call love!" breathed the girl to herself. "This is the passion of which poets have sung and authors written! Why, it seems to me the cruellest, most despicable thing on earth! Sir Ira loves me, and therefore he is determined on my misery. Oh, Stacy, dear! you were quite right! There is nothing so wicked or perfidious in this whole world as a young man!"

"I never did him any harm," mused the poor girl between her sobs. "I never asked him to like me, and I am sure I had quite forgotten about meeting him in the train and his lending me ninepence because I had lost my purse with my ticket in it. I would rather have walked every step of the way or stayed at the railway station like a prisoner while Mary fetched the ninepence had I only known all that was to come of it; but how could I think a young man would remember such a trifling incident when I had forgotten all about it? Why, when Lady Munro introduced me to Sir Ira I never even recognised him."

Poppie grew calmer presently. She stirred the fire into a cheerful blaze, drew her chair close up to it, and tried to image out her future.

And to understand the girl's difficulties we must make a confession.

Poppie had, in a measure, deceived her employer, for, though from childhood she had been called "Miss Smith," she was not the lady who had presided over Mrs. Disney's school-room, and been by her recommended to the Countess of Munro.

The Gorton scholar, the excellent instructress, who only left Mrs. Disney because she "objected to boys," was Guy Forrester's independent ward, Anastasia Smith, the Stacy of Poppie's friendship.

The two Miss Smiths were warmly attached, and when one autumn night a cab drove up to the Bloomsbury lodgings, and Poppie flung herself into her friend's arms, imploring her to save her from her enemy, to hide her at any cost, Stacy had given a generous consent. She made the pretty fugitive warmly welcome.

Since she left Mrs. Disney's she had come into a little money—doubtless the three hundred a year alluded to by Mr. Fordred as inalienably Miss Smith's own—and, though practically disinherited by her grandfather's will, was yet the mistress of an honest little independence; therefore, she had hidden farewell to teaching, and gave herself up to the far more congenial pursuit of advancing the cause of women's rights.

Gladly would she have kept Poppie with her entirely, but Miss Smith the younger refused to accept any protracted hospitality.

What she wanted, she protested, was work and change of scene. She should never feel safe from her enemy in London.

Stacy's heart was a great deal softer than her face. Utterly melted by Poppie's distress, she became as wax in her hands; and when Lady Munro's situation was heard of she was easily prevailed upon to allow Poppie to reap the benefit of her own experience.

"I don't see any harm in it," said the lady whose independence so troubled Guy. "For a child of six you are a far more suitable teacher than any Gorton scholar; and unless you come face with Mrs. Disney you may stay years with the Countess without her ever suspecting anything. Of course there's a little risk."

"It is the risk that makes it delightful, Stacy," said Poppie, enthusiastically. "It will be quite exciting."

Stacy was hardly so confident.

"It may turn out badly," she said, slowly; "but I don't see why it should. You see, Poppie, your name is Smith, so that you can't be accused of calling yourself by an alias, and then if anything unpleasant happened, you would only have to come back to me!"

"Like a bad shilling or a rejected manuscript? Wish me better success than that, dear Stacy."

And now, barely six weeks after she left her friend, Poppie found the latter's fears realised.

The secret they had fancied no one but Mrs. Disney could reveal had been penetrated by one who would use it unquestionably for his own ends, and Stacy's *protège* was in as great a predicament as the night when she had fled to the dull Bloomsbury lodgings.

"It is very cruel," thought the poor girl, as

she tried to plan out her future. "He is so rich and prosperous. I don't suppose he has a trouble in the world, and yet he can't let me have just my humble place at Ardmore. And I have no one to advise me. I daren't tell Stacy, because she would think it my fault. She always says no man, bad as they all are, would presume to make love to a girl unless she gave him distinct encouragement. Well, I am sure I never encouraged Sir Ira. There is no one to help me—no one to advise me! The Earl is just wrapped up in Sir Ira, and I couldn't speak to Lady Munro because she thinks all women ought to be married, and would be sure to say I was flying in the face of Providence by rejecting such a *parti* as Sir Ira! There is Mr. Forrester, he is always kind. He has got me out of two difficulties already; but then he is a man, and perhaps he wouldn't understand. There is so little I could tell him, so much I should have to keep back! But he is Stacy's guardian, and her grandfather trusted him."

Poppie had not decided on anything. Her mind was still in chaos when she lighted her silver lamp and rose to go to bed.

Her way lay through the picture-gallery, and she paused for a moment before the portrait of Lord Munro's heir.

"How strong and brave he looks!" muttered the poor troubled child to herself. "Oh! if only I had had a brother like that I should never have been so miserable!"

"Will you let him fill a brother's place to you?" asked a deep, musical voice near her, and looking up, she saw Guy Forrester himself watching her with a great pity in his dark eyes.

"Oh! Mr. Forrester!"

"Don't be frightened, Miss Smith. I was only passing to my own rooms. You have been sitting up late. I hope you are not in trouble?"

Once then she strove to answer, but her trembling lips would not move. Guy took her ice-cold hand in his, and led her back to the schoolroom.

"I have seen you in two difficulties, Miss Smith. Don't you think I have a claim to help you in a third?" he asked, persuasively.

"You saved my life," said Poppie, wistfully. "The Countess said so; and I always meant to thank you, only somehow—"

"Somehow Sir Ira Vernon claimed so much of your time you had none left for Guy Forrester—is that it?"

"Oh! no, no! I could not thank you because I was so sorry!"

"Poppie!"

She did not resent his use of her pretty pet name, or remind him, as she had done Sir Ira, that she was "Miss Smith."

She just sat there where he had placed her, shivering as one stricken with a sudden chill, and a world of sadness in her sweet brown eyes.

"I am quite sure your are ill?" said Guy anxiously. "My aunt has gone to bed, but I only you would let me I could fetch the housekeeper or Dolly's nurse?"

"I am not ill!"

"Then you are in trouble?"

"Sore trouble!"

"Poor child!"

"Don't call me *that*. It was *his* name for me. No one has ever called me 'child' since he left me!"

Of course she meant her father. Her loyal, tender grief for his memory cut Guy to the very heart.

Never thus could son or daughter mourn for him.

But he put his own feelings aside manfully, and strove to comfort the girl, who must never guess she was his life's love.

"I wish you would trust me. Poppie, it must be a very bitter trouble that makes you regret your life was spared instead of perishing in the snowstorm!"

"It is. I am in such trouble, Mr. Forrester; it seems to me that nothing but my death could set things right!"

"I think that would set things very wrong. How about your friend Stacy?"

"She has so many other things to think of. You see, Mr. Forrester, I am only a drop in the ocean of her thoughts!"

"And Sir Ira Vernon?"

Poppie shuddered convulsively.

"What do you mean?"

Guy's manner grew stiff and cold.

"I do not want to be inquisitive, but it has seemed to me you were the magnet that detained Vernon at the Castle."

To his amazement a cold, little hand was laid entreatingly on his coat-sleeve.

"Oh! Mr. Forrester, won't you make him go?"

"My dear child," and Guy spoke as persuasively as though he had been talking to little Dolly, "what need is there for you to be alarmed like this?"

"I think it is true what you said."

"And if it is?"

"It is awful."

Guy smiled. He felt reassured. Certainly this was not the way she would have treated the subject had Vernon been his successful rival; and though pretty, tearful Poppie could never be ought to him, he could not help rejoicing he was not called on to see her Ira's bride.

"You need not be so frightened," he said, gently. "If I am right in my surmise, and Sir Ira wishes to make you Lady Vernon, the matter is easily settled."

Poppie interrupted him with a sob.

"It isn't."

"If you can return his attachment you will have a brilliant position," went on Guy, trying to speak calmly. "If not, my uncle and aunt are in no hurry to lose you. As you know, the point only hinges on one question. Do you like Sir Ira?"

"I hate him!"

There was no mistaking her earnestness. Guy felt puzzled.

Ira was a fascinating, handsome, young fellow. Few girls, heart-whole, would have refused his love; that any should declare she hated him seemed incredible.

"Then you need never trouble your head about him," said Poppie's adviser, kindly. "You will just have to say, 'No, thank you,' and the thing will be done with."

"I have said 'No, thank you,' a dozen times," protested Poppie, tearfully; "and he won't believe me. Oh! Mr. Forrester, is it wrong of me to speak to you like this?"

"No," and Guy tried hard to conquer the passionate longing to take her in his arms and kiss her tears away which seized him at this wistful appeal. "It is quite right, Poppie. You know you are living in my uncle's house, and I have a right to protect you!"

"I don't want to be protected," said the girl, petulantly.

It dawned on Guy there must be something in the term "protect" peculiarly odious to the feminine mind, since the only two young ladies he had conversed with since his return to England had with one voice assured him they did not need protection at his hands.

"What do you want, Poppie; try and tell me that?"

Poppie hesitated.

"I should like Sir Ira to go away to-night."

"He will probably leave very soon."

"I should like him to go to-night; I should like to feel sure he would never speak to Lord Munro or the Countess again."

"But, Poppie, that is an impossible task to set me. I can't drive poor Vernon away without a word of adieu to his host!"

"Then I am hopeless."

"Poppie."

"If he stays he will drive me away; he has sworn he will unless I—"

"Unless you marry him. Poppie, it is nothing in the world but an idle threat. Ardmore Castle is not Vernon's; he can't select his inmates or dismiss them at pleasure."

"Do you remember the first time you saw me, Mr. Forrester?"

"I don't think I shall ever forget it."

"I told you then I had an enemy."

"But you could not mean Vernon. I don't believe he was ever in Maryland in his life."

"No; I don't mean him."

"Can't you trust me, Poppie?"

"Yes; but I can say so little; to escape my enemy I have had to do strange things. I have done one or two very wicked things, and he knows it."

"I don't believe you ever did anything wicked in your life."

"But I have," said Poppie, gravely. "I have been a thief and an adventuress. If Sir Ira tells Lord Munro all he knows of my history I should be hunted from Ardmore like a criminal. I might even be put in prison."

Guy looked at her in miserable bewilderment. He could not believe her, and yet what girl would knowingly accuse herself of such crimes if innocent?

"Vernon must be a villain to trade on your fears," he said, slowly.

"I think he is, but that does not make me right. He says if he told the truth no one who was respectable would ever speak to me again—that I should be an outcast from everything good and pleasant."

"Don't," said Guy, hoarsely; "in pity for me forbear, if you have no pity for yourself."

Poppie's last hope faded. She forgot that she had never told Mr. Forrester the true nature of her offence, but had left it to his imagination. She only felt that he condemned her, and nothing else mattered.

"If I send him away," said Poppie, wearily, "he will tell your uncle. Lord Munro and the Countess will know that I am a 'nameless adventuress,' that instead of being a Girton scholar I never was inside a school in my whole life. Do you think they will forgive me?"

He knew they would not; knew that generous as was Lady Munro's nature she resented bitterly the least attempt at deception—that she had almost fendish ideas concerning the antecedents of women, and that if there was one thing for which she had a hatred it was a woman with a history.

No; clearly for Poppie there would be no pity at Lady Munro's hands, and the Earl had chosen Ira Vernon as his chief adviser, so that he was likely to be hard indeed upon the child who had crept into his house under false pretences.

"I understand," said Poppie, slowly, "you think they would feel as you do and despise me. No, don't contradict me, Mr. Forrester. I feel just what you are thinking of me. Well, you understand now why I am sorry you saved my life."

"I am not sorry," he began hastily, but the girl interrupted him.

"You will be some day, more sorry than words can say. But I am going to bed now. Mr. Forrester, I may be very wicked, I know you think I am; but I shall never forget your kindness to me as long as I live. You will be rich and great, and I shall be—how did Sir Ira phrase it? oh! I remember—an exile from everything good and pleasant; but, perhaps, even a wail's gratitude won't harm you, and it will be yours while I live."

Before Guy could think of words to answer her, before he could realise her intention, she had raised his hand, pressed her lips to it with childish grace, and hastily left the room, which, adventuress though she was, yet seemed to have lost something when robbed of her fair presence.

(To be continued.)

REMOVAL is the punishment of crime; repentance its expiation. The former appertains to a tormented conscience; the latter to a soul changed for the better.

A GOLDEN DESTINY.

—35—

CHAPTER XXIX.—(continued.)

"I HAVE just had a letter which calls me to London on rather urgent business," Lord St. Croix said—wisely refraining from mentioning the nature of that "business"—"so I intend catching the one-fifty up train. I hope you won't mind this abrupt leave-taking, but I shall be back either to-night or to-morrow."

"Don't hurry on my account," she said, with unflattering graciousness, "I know that business cannot be set aside, and I am not so unreasonable as to wish you to neglect it on my account."

She did not ask him any questions, and it seemed to St. Croix that there was a shade of relief in her manner as she bade him farewell.

He was puzzled, and hardly pleased—for although he knew she did not really love him he had quite enough of a man's vanity to feel wounded at her unconcealed indifference to his absence.

He shrugged his shoulders as he left her.

"We shall be the very type of a fashionable couple," he said to himself, with a smile, half sad, half cynical. "We shall see each other at dinner, and go into society together in the evening, and beyond that—strangers! How different it would have been if only—"

But he did not pursue these musings, for they were dangerous, and he knew it. Still, in spite of his efforts, Irene's face would come before him as he was born swiftly along, through the sunlit fields, and past pleasant homes, and well-timbered parks, where the deer were hiding in bracken that almost concealed them from view.

His love for her, stemmed though it might be by a stern sense of duty, rose ever and anon in his heart, like some strong, swiftly-flowing river, whose flood it is impossible to withstand.

At Paddington he got into a hansom, and drove straight to the docks—a long journey, that seemed to him interminable, and when he at length arrived at his destination he was rather dazed by surroundings, that were to him entirely novel.

However, presently he found one of the officials, to whom he applied for information, and his inquiries were crowned with a certain amount of success—more than he could have counted upon, in fact.

Yes, there was a small vessel called the *Anna-Maria*, and she had left the docks the night before last on the ebb tide. She was schooner-rigged, and bound for the port of Melbourne, and the name of her captain was Marlow. To the best of his belief she carried a cargo of rails, and had little, if any, accommodation for passengers. Knew Jim Marlow very well by sight—fancied he had had a drink with him, but was not sure. As to his character, knew nothing whatever about it—it was not his business to inquire; but if the gentleman had any more questions to ask concerning the *Anna-Maria* it was likely enough he could get them answered by Tom Bowles yonder—the man in the tug that was just making fast over there, for as it happened he had towed the vessel down the river, and had therefore only just left her.

St. Croix thanked him, and stepped hastily to the spot indicated, where the tug had just made fast; and then he paused, for coming up the steps was a woman whom he was not slow to recognize, but whose grimly satisfied face made his heart grow sick.

It was Mrs. Sumner, and from her appearance it was only too evident that the undertaking in which she had been engaged was successful.

CHAPTER XXX.

THERE could be no doubt that the sight of Lord St. Croix, standing on the top of the steps, with hand outstretched to help her on

to the quay, was by no means a pleasant one; nevertheless, she did not for a moment lose her self-possession.

"Thank you, my lord," she said, respectfully, as she availed herself of the offered help. "It is a surprise to see you here. I hope nothing has happened at the Court?"

The Viscount disregarded her inquiry; for to go into particulars as to what had happened at the Court, in the shape of the accident to Sir Trarice, would have led him too far away from his subject.

"I am afraid, Mrs. Sumner, I am more desirous of asking questions than answering them. You have just left Miss Duval on board the *Anna-Maria*, I presume?"

She looked a little startled, not knowing how far his knowledge might extend.

"She is bound for Melbourne?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And her captain's name is Marlow. You see I know all particulars, Mrs. Sumner."

She returned his gaze defiantly, though her face grew paler.

"And you are welcome, my lord. There is nothing for me to be ashamed of in my sending my niece to Australia."

"It is rather a long journey for her to make alone, in a vessel which carries no other passengers, and with no person of her own sex for companionship."

"I cannot help that, Lord St. Croix. Irene is not a lady, and I can't provide a maid for her, like Mrs. Seymour could for Miss Ermentrude. A girl like Irene, who has her own living to make, must be prepared to rough it!"

This was a truth he could not gainsay, and Harold felt she was certainly holding her own, if not getting the better of the argument.

"Still," he said boldly, "I don't know whether you are aware that you have rendered yourself amenable to the laws of your country by forcing Miss Duval on board ship against her will, and drugging her in order to prevent opposition on her part?"

It was a bold stroke, but it answered, for the woman turned absolutely livid, and her eyes glared like those of a wild animal suddenly brought to bay.

"I don't know what you mean!" she exclaimed at last. "If you are taking advantage of your rank, and because you are a rich man, and a lord, and think you can say whatever you like to me, let me tell you such conduct is unworthy of any gentleman!"

"You are quite right," he returned, gravely, "and if I were doing as you say, I should certainly be unworthy of the name of gentleman. But, in effect, this is far from being the case, for I am only trying to aid a helpless girl against the machinations of powerful enemies."

"You are talking riddles, my lord. Irene has no enemies—except yourself, perhaps. I am a woman of some experience, Lord St. Croix, and I know what it means when an aristocrat like yourself takes too much notice of a poor girl who happens to be very pretty. It was as much for the purpose of guarding her against you, as anything else, that I thought it best to remove her out of the country."

The audacity of the woman absolutely made the Viscount stagger back, even while a certain sort of admiration for the cleverness with which she defended herself by bringing this counter-charge moved him.

It really seemed impossible to take her at a disadvantage, for even when he made a bold stroke she capped it with a bolder.

"You know very well that you are uttering a lie!" he said, sternly; "for my motives in making inquiries regarding Irene are those of the purest and most disinterested friendship. Your abominable insinuations deserve no notice on my part; but in order to convince you of my integrity, I may as well tell you that I am betrothed to Miss Seymour, and it will not be long ere our marriage takes place."

The woman's face lighted up with a sudden

radiance. The news actually seemed to delight her, and for the moment she thought of nothing else.

"Are you really engaged to Miss Ermentrude? At last—at last!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands together, and making no effort to conceal her exultation.

He drew back with some faint, inexplicable sense of repulsion.

"I told you this, merely to set at rest your suspicions—if indeed you cherish any"—he observed, coldly. "And now, perhaps, you will not object to inform me for what purpose you have sent your niece to the Antipodes?"

"I have already told you, my lord, and there is little more to add, except that relatives of mine will meet her at Melbourne, and that her future will be well looked after. And you must permit me to say that, as the girl's nearest relative, I am surely the best judge of what is good for her, and that further interference on your lordship's part will be not only unnecessary, but liable to misconception."

The young man coloured, and bit his lip, feeling that by her adroitness in turning the tables she had really placed him in a false position.

"Besides," she went on, seeing her advantage, and pursuing it, "anything that you can now do will not make the least difference, seeing that Irene is by this time well on her way to Australia, and even if any one were mad enough to hire a steamer and follow her, they would have small chance of finding her, for the ocean is a wide place, as your lordship is aware, and a sailing vessel like the *Anna-Maria* does not follow a straight line, but is blown about, as one may say, at the mercy of wind and waves. I will wish you good-day, my lord!"

And making a respectful courtesy she passed on, puzzling the while as to how St. Croix came by his information, and rejoicing in the fact that she had at last outwitted him.

And he (knowing that there was indeed nothing to be done, for all that Mrs. Sumner had said was quite true, and she was certainly Irene's lawful guardian) went back to Woodleigh Court, feeling that a page had been turned in his history, and behind it lay all that was brightest and best in life!

That was an eventful day in the history of a good many persons connected with this narrative, and certainly not the least eventful to Roy Fraser, who as he stood miserably on the platform of one of the great London termini suddenly felt a hand laid heavily on his shoulder, and a voice from behind, said,—

"I arrest you in the Queen's name!"

Terrible words—full of meaning.

Roy was not, ordinarily, an excitable young man, and he turned round quietly to face our friend Manning, whom he had often seen in Blackminster, and therefore knew by sight.

"You are making a mistake," he said, "I have done nothing for which you can arrest me."

The constable smiled grimly—like one used to these sort of denials.

"No sir; of course not. But you must explain that to the magistrates, not to me. Meanwhile I must trouble you to come along of me, and the quieter you come the better. I've no wish to make a fuss, and attract attention."

"Look here, my friend," said Roy, "you can hardly expect me to obey you without knowing your authority for exacting obedience."

"My authority is this warrant"—he showed it in his left hand—"signed by Squire Wyndham, Justice of the Peace, and it authorises me to arrest Mr. Roy Fraser, architect. I suppose you don't deny that you are Mr. Roy Fraser, architect?"

"No," the young man returned, with a look of bewilderment. "I don't deny it. But what charge is brought against me?"

"Murder."

"Murder!"

The young man took a step backwards—or rather would have taken it but for the constable's detaining hand. Then he laughed.

"Whose murder?"

"The lady who lived in The Lodge, and who called herself Elizabeth Fanning."

"Dead—Mrs. Fanning dead? Why I saw her last night—"

"You'd better mind what you let out, sir," interrupted his captor. "I am bound to warn you that any admission you make will be used against you at the inquest. If you'll take my advice, you'll just hold your tongue, and make no attempt to escape, and then I needn't trouble you with the unpleasantness of handcuffs."

A moment's reflection was sufficient to convince Roy that this was indeed his wisest course.

"All right," he said, calmly. "I had just taken a ticket for Dover, but I'll go to Blackminster instead. You say the warrant is made out by Squire Wyndham?"

"Yes, the Squire signed it very much against his will," answered Manning, who was not a bad sort of fellow in the main, and had no wish to make things more unpleasant than need be for his prisoner.

He linked his arm in that of Roy, and together they went to another platform, where the Blackminster train was waiting. As they passed a first-class smoking compartment, a head was thrust out, and the voice of Lord St. Croix exclaimed,—

"Hulloa! Fraser, old fellow, is that you? Get in this carriage—there is no one here beside myself."

Roy looked interrogatively at the constable, not quite sure whether it was in his power to obey the invitation, but Manning nodded assentingly.

"Certainly, if his lordship wishes it," he said, being nothing loth to occupy the same compartment as an Earl's son, "only, of course, I must get in as well."

He made a sign to a policeman in plain clothes who was following them, that he was to seat himself in the next carriage, and then followed Fraser into the one in which St. Croix was sitting, solacing himself with a cigar, but looking by no means in a contented frame of mind. He shook hands with Fraser and then said,—

"I am glad I happened to see you, for I wanted to have a talk with you over this mess into which you have contrived to get yourself—"

"I wish you would explain the meaning of it to me," interrupted Roy, earnestly. "I know that I am arrested on the charge of murder, but that is all. Of the grounds for suspecting me I am quite ignorant."

The Viscount looked at Manning in some embarrassment, and the constable came to his aid.

"This is it, sir," he said, addressing himself to Fraser. "The lady was found dead this morning, and it was proved that she had been stabbed. Now, you were the last person who was seen to leave her house, and a pistol has been found bearing your initials in her room. These two facts were considered sufficient to justify your arrest."

"I was certainly at the Lodge last night, but of the finding of the pistol I know nothing at all, for I have only had one pistol in my life, and that is in my possession at the present moment," Roy returned. "In point of fact, it is in this bag."

He pointed to the Gladstone bag which he had had in his hand at the time of his arrest, and would have opened it, but Manning quietly removed it from his reach.

"Excuse me, sir, but I must take possession of this. You'll have ample opportunities for showing its contents by and by."

Roy turned pale—not because he was afraid of what the bag might contain, but this withholding of his own property seemed to bring home to him the fact that he was no longer a free man.

His change of countenance was observed by the constable, who drew from it an inference unfavourable to his innocence.

"Now listen to me," said St. Croix, bending forward, and placing his hand on the arm of the young architect, "you are in an awkward position at present, but if you only keep your wits about you, and tell the whole truth concerning your relations with Mrs. Fanning, I have no doubt that you will speedily be at liberty."

"I don't know what you mean!" exclaimed Roy, interrupting him, and flushing angrily at the significance of his tone. "My relations with Mrs. Fanning were of the most trifling character—she was indeed merely a casual acquaintance—and accident, not design, had to do with my visiting her. I have only seen her three or four times in my life, and what motive could I possibly have in doing her an injury?"

"Granted, my dear fellow, and yet, for all that, as you are in this dilemma, the question now is to get you out. Of course you must have a lawyer to defend you at the inquest. Have you any preference?"

Roy shook his head. As a matter of fact he was even yet too bewildered to thoroughly realise his position.

"Very well, then, we will have Barclay. You remember Barclay, who was with us at Christchurch, don't you? He is a clever fellow, and will do his best for you, I am sure. I will telegraph to him to come down first thing to-morrow morning."

"You are very kind, St. Croix," Roy said. "I'm sure I don't know why you should go to all this trouble on my behalf."

"Nonsense, my dear boy! I am very glad I happened to be at Woodleigh, otherwise I should have heard nothing about this affair. We used to be chums in the old days, and a friend is not worth much if he deserts you in adversity, is he? Now, have a cigar, and you too, Manning; and try and forget all about this very unpleasant business. Let us think we are at college once more—or, better still, running about in short jackets at Eton, and up to all the mischief under the sun. When I think of those old days, Longfellow's lines nearly always come into my mind:

"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE inquest on the body of the murdered woman was adjourned, in order to give time for the production of fresh evidence; and St. Croix, in the meanwhile, consulted with Wise, in whom, strange to say, he felt a certain degree of confidence, and also had Mr. Barclay—the barrister of whom he had spoken—down from London to defend Fraser.

As may be imagined, the affair created great excitement both in Wyndhamstowe and Blackminster, for the architect was well known in both places, and had contrived to render himself popular, even during the short time he had been in the country. Besides, it was many years since a crime of such magnitude had been committed in the neighbourhood, and Wyndhamstowe had had an unpleasant importance thrust upon it through the medium of the newspapers.

As for Roy himself, he seemed to sink into a state bordering on apathetic despair. The truth was, he had gone through so much trouble of late that it seemed to him as if Fate itself were against him. His one anxiety was to keep the news of his position from his mother, whose health had of late been very delicate, and who had gone to the south of France on that account.

What miserable days those were that intervened between his arrest and the inquest! And not only miserable for him, but for Marjorie as well. Looking back upon them after-

wards, they both wondered how they bore themselves as well as they did.

The excitement and anxiety on his friend's account were really rather a good thing for St. Croix, for they kept him from brooding on his own trouble as much as he otherwise might have done. And yet the remembrance of Irene hardly ever left him, and it was only by dint of reminding himself that honour bound him to Ermentrude that he was prevented from breaking off his engagement once for all.

Sir Trivice slowly progressed to convalescence, but he was not yet well enough to hear the tale the detective had to tell him, and so he was still in ignorance of the treachery that had so nearly cost him his life.

The only person who seemed perfectly contented and at her ease was Mrs. Seymour, and she certainly lost the look of care and anxiety that had formerly rested on her features, and appeared once more the handsome, debonnaire hostess of old—suave, smiling, and courteous.

Not a word passed between her and St. Croix concerning Irene, although the young man felt perfectly sure that Mrs. Sumner had taken her mistress into her confidence, and that the latter was perfectly aware of the interest he took in the friendless girl. However, Mrs. Seymour was a clever woman, who not only knew when to speak, but—a rare talent indeed in a lady—when to hold her tongue!

At last the day of the inquest arrived, and the room in which it was held was crowded with people, all morbidly anxious to hear the proceedings. St. Croix and Barclay were, of course, present, the former regretting that he had not pressed Fraser for his confidence with regard to his friendship for Mrs. Fanning, as his reticence on the point left the lawyer rather at a loss.

Roy had kept an obstinate silence, even when Barclay told him how necessary it was that he should be perfectly open, and the reason for this lay in the fact that to have been frank would be to drag in Marjorie's name and the details of their secret engagement—a course of action from which the young man instinctively shrank.

It therefore happened that even the lawyer, who was watching the proceedings on his behalf, felt himself at a disadvantage. He had indeed, threatened to have nothing to do with the case when he found that Roy remained determined, and it had only been the entreaties of Lord St. Croix which had prevented him from carrying his threat into execution.

Amongst those present were the Squire and Geoffrey Wyndham; and the former made a point of shaking hands with the accused man, in spite of Geoffrey's remonstrance.

"Sorry to see you here; hope you'll soon be able to disprove the accusation," he whispered. "Did not like signing the warrant, but duty, you know—duty compelled it."

"I understand, Squire," returned Roy, grateful at this mark of faith. "I knew that you would not believe me guilty, even if others did!"

Then a sudden hush fell on the crowded room, and the proceedings commenced.

The first witnesses called were Doctor Wootton and Dale, the latter of whom proved being spoken to by Bessie Webber, while the former stated the position in which he had found the body of the murdered woman, and also his belief that the wound which caused death could not have been self-inflicted.

Asked his grounds for this belief, he said that the blow was evidently dealt by a strong hand—in all probability a man's, for the wound was a clean, incisive one, and must have instantly proved fatal.

Mr. Barclay asked this witness no questions, and the next one called was Bessie Webber, who gave her evidence very clearly and distinctly.

It amounted to what she had already told Manning, namely, that she had seen Roy Fraser—whom she at once identified—twice at

her mistress's house, and that she had left him there on the evening of the murder; also that she believed he had been there two nights before, for she had heard voices raised when she was in bed, and came to the conclusion that her mistress was quarrelling with somebody, who she concluded must have been Mr. Fraser.

Asked if other visitors came to the Lodge, she replied in the negative, and answered in the same way the question as to whether she knew anything of her late mistress's antecedents.

Then Mr. Barclay rose and asked leave to put a few queries to this witness. First of all observing that Mr. Fraser did not deny having been at the Lodge on two of the occasions referred to, although he emphatically denied that he had ever quarrelled with the deceased.

"What sort of a temper had your late mistress?"

"She was rather quick tempered."

"Passionate?"

"Yes."

"And easily flew into a rage?"

Bessie admitted this also, but hesitatingly, as if she did not like speaking ill of the dead.

"Have you ever heard her speak of Mr. Fraser?"

"Never!"

"Was she a talkative woman?"

"Sometimes she was, and sometimes she wasn't. Occasionally she would have me in in the afternoon, when I had done my work, and cleaned myself, and then she would talk to me."

"On what subject?"

"Generally about Miss Marjorie or Squire Wyndham."

Here there was a slight movement of surprise, and Roy himself looked uneasy, hardly knowing what might be next elicited.

"Did she know Miss Wyndham?"

"She had spoken to her once, I think—at least, I saw them together at the bottom of the garden."

"Did she speak of her in a friendly or unfriendly tone?"

Bessie fidgetted nervously, and did not reply.

"You must answer my question," said Mr. Barclay, not sternly, but with some authority in his voice. "I will, however, put it in another form. Did Mrs. Fanning say she liked Miss Wyndham?"

"No, sir."

"And she gave you the contrary impression—that she did not like her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did she say what reasons she had for disliking her?"

"No; but she once asked me if I thought Miss Marjorie pretty; and when I said yes she told me I was a stupid child, who knew nothing about such matters. So," concluded Bessie, with some shrewdness, "I fancied she would rather I had said I did not think Miss Marjorie pretty."

Mr. Barclay smiled.

"Anything else?"

"Well, sir, I told her that Miss Marjorie was very good to the poor, and visited them, and gave them presents, and that everybody liked her; and then Mrs. Fanning said it was easy enough to visit and give money when you were rich, and had nothing else to do, and that of course people liked those who gave them presents. For her part, she thought it was only Miss Marjorie's duty to be generous and kind to her father's tenants."

"And was that all she said concerning the Wyndhams? Give yourself time to think before you answer."

"I remember one more thing which she said only a few days ago, and that was that perhaps the time would come when she would take Miss Marjorie's place."

"Do you know what she meant by that?"

"No, sir, and I asked her, but she only smiled, and said time would show."

Mr. Barclay asked a few more questions, but did not succeed in eliciting anything material

from the witness, and after Bessie had stepped down her place was taken by Squire Wyndham, who simply stated that he had let the Lodge to the deceased lady, of whom he knew nothing, and who had paid a quarter's rent in advance in lieu of giving references. He had seen her once or twice since, but she had given no clue as to her motive in choosing such an out-of-the-way place to live in, and of course he had not asked any impertinent questions. Recollected seeing Mr. Roy Fraser walking up the garden with her one day a little while ago, and concluded from the manner of the pair that they must be friends.

Then the Squire added a superfluous remark—that he was of opinion Mr. Fraser must have mentioned the Lodge to Mrs. Fanning, as he could not imagine in what other way it was possible for her to have heard of it.

Mr. Barclay declined to cross-examine him, and next to him appeared the railway porter, William Tubbs—more familiarly called "Bill."

This gentleman appeared by no means at his ease, and replies had to be drawn from him—metaphorically—by main force. He was habited in his best clothes, and wore a top hat, which latter, when he took it off, he twirled nervously in his hands. The fact was he regarded the inquest as something between a Sunday and a holiday—an occasion when unlimited "drinks" might be expected and indulged in, while at the same time a solemnity of demeanour was not only becoming, but necessary.

His answers were for the most part monosyllabic; but this kept him to the point, and perhaps the brevity was a good thing, and his evidence simply proved that Roy Fraser had alighted at Wyndhamstowe from the six thirty-five down train, and had not gone back by the mail—which was the only up-train that stopped at Wyndhamstowe. These facts were corroborated by the other porter, James Dobson; and after his examination was over, a small, slight, dark-haired woman presented herself as witness.

"Your name is Selina Whetmore?"

"Yes."

"And you keep a temperance hotel in E—Street, Paddington?"

"Yes."

"Were you acquainted with the deceased woman?"

"Yes; she took a bedroom, and slept at my house for nearly a fortnight."

"Who brought her to your house?"

"Mr. Roy Fraser."

(Sensation.)

"When did she leave you?"

"I cannot tell the exact date without referring to my books; but it was on the morning of the day that she went to the Lodge at Wyndhamstowe."

"How do you know that?"

"Because she was expecting a letter; and she gave me her address at the Lodge in order that I might forward it when it came."

"Did you do so?"

"No, sir; because no letter ever arrived."

"Are you personally acquainted with Mr. Roy Fraser?"

"Yes; at least, he once slept in my house for three or four nights; and when I told him that I had only just set up the hotel, and was a widow with five children, he promised to recommend me when he had the chance."

"And is that all you know about him?"

"That is all, sir."

"And now, with regard to Mrs. Fanning. Did she ever mention to you her object for going to such a lonely place as the Lodge?"

"No, sir; she never said a word to me about it, beyond giving me the address. She was a very stand-offish sort of a lady, and rarely spoke except to give orders about her meals. I fancied she did not speak English very perfectly, and that was the reason for keeping herself to herself."

Here Roy whispered something to Barclay, and the latter put a question to the witness, whose examination was now over.

"Did not Mr. Fraser tell you, when he brought Mrs. Fanning to your hotel, that she was a stranger to him?"

The woman considered a moment. She was well-disposed towards Roy, and did not wish to say anything that could be prejudicial to him; but, at the same time, she had a conscientious desire to tell the truth.

"He may have done so, sir; but I don't recollect it."

The next evidence given was by the constable, Manning, who looked around at the excited crowd with a calmly judicial air, as though to announce that this sort of thing was a matter of the most trifling moment to him, and, indeed, of almost daily occurrence!—an attitude which greatly impressed the rustics with a sense of his importance.

He proved finding the revolver (produced) with the initials "R. F." upon it, and also arresting Mr. Fraser at the London station just as he was on the point of taking the train to Dover. In his possession was found a Gladstone bag, and, amongst other things, it contained a revolver precisely similar to the one discovered at the Lodge, and bearing the same initials—in point of fact, the two formed a pair. A dagger had also been found lying near the murdered woman, and it was supposed that with this weapon the crime must have been committed, but, as yet, no one had been able to identify it.

This constituted the whole of the constable's evidence, but, brief as it was, it was almost damning to the accused man, and even Roy himself grew paler as he heard it.

"Mr. Fraser," said the Coroner, after Manning had stepped down, "you are at liberty to make a statement or not, as you wish; but I warn you that whatever you may say will be liable to be used against you later on; so that if you prefer keeping silence, it is quite within your right to do so."

"I prefer making my statement now, if you please, sir," the young man answered quietly, "and I am ready to be sworn at once."

He kissed the book, and then began to speak, calmly, but still with visibly repressed excitement, while an intense hush fell on the crowded room, and every ear was bent attentively to listen to what he had to say.

Perhaps he felt the silence embarrassing, for he cast a swift glance around, and his cheek flushed. St. Croix, who was standing near him, and who met his eyes, leaned forward to whisper,—

"Courage, old boy, courage! Tell the truth, and shame the devil."

Fraser smiled faintly at the admonition, and then began:

"I first of all declare my perfect innocence of this crime, and more than that my former ignorance of it, for until I was arrested I had no idea but that Mrs. Fanning was still living. My acquaintance with her was of the slightest, and began in a quite casual manner." He thereupon related how he had met her at the station when she missed the train to Wyndhamstowe, and in pity for her loneliness, escorted her to the temperance hotel, where he had left her. "I next saw her about three days before the murder was committed, and on that occasion she waylaid me at the bottom of her garden, when I was passing, and told me some news to the effect that the person whom I had really come to see was away from home, and therefore my journey had been in vain. After this, she said she wished to ask my advice on a matter concerning herself, and insisted on my staying luncheon. I went away in the afternoon, and saw her again the night before the murder, when I found her in a state of great excitement occasioned by some news that she gave me."

He stopped suddenly, and the Coroner took the opportunity of putting an inquiry.

"What was the nature of the news?"

"That I prefer not mentioning, as it concerns a lady whose name I wish should be withheld from these proceedings."

A slightly dubious expression came on the

Coroner's face as he made a note of the reply, which he evidently regarded as a subterfuge.

"The news also affected me in a great degree, and when I left the lodge at about half-past seven o'clock, being rather undetermined concerning what I should do, I wandered through the wood, until I found I had missed the mail from Wyndhamstowe, and so I walked into Blackminster, and was just in time to catch the last up-train from that station. As to the pistol found in my bag, I can only say it formerly belonged to my father, and I had no idea it was one of a pair. Most decidedly I never saw the second produced by Manning, and I am quite at a loss to account for this coincidence." As he ceased speaking there was a slight murmur of dissatisfaction. Evidently his explanation was not regarded as being in the least satisfactory, and the dubious expression still remained on the Coroner's face.

"You were not Mrs. Fanning's lover?" he asked, and Roy's answer was quick and indignant.

"Certainly not!"

"Will you tell us the name of the person you came to see at Wyndhamstowe, if it was not the deceased lady?"

"I cannot, sir," Roy returned, very firmly, although his face flushed. "It would be a breach of honour if I were to do so."

"Are you aware that your refusal is likely to produce a very unfavourable impression?"

"I think it is very probable, but I cannot help it."

"Can you explain how it was that Manning found you at the station, equipped for a journey, on the day after the murder?"

"Yes. I had heard that my mother, who is in the south of France for her health, was very much worse, and so I determined to go and see her. I had booked to Dover, because I had not quite decided what route to take after leaving England."

This was all he had to say, and then the coroner proceeded to sum up. He did so fairly enough, and with every desire to be impartial; still, it was quite clear that his own mind was made up as to Roy's guilt, and certainly the circumstantial evidence against him was very strong.

The Coroner pointed out, first of all, the extreme improbability of a lady coming to live in a place like the Lodge, and amongst perfect strangers, unless she had motives for desiring concealment—and indeed, the mere fact of her knowing that the Lodge was to let suggested the idea that someone had already told her of its existence. It seemed pretty clear that that person could be none other than Mr. Roy Fraser, when it was borne in mind that he was the sole person who visited her; and that, from his previous acquaintance with the neighbourhood, he would know all about the Lodge, and its eligibility as a home for a lady who wished to lead a very retired life.

He had given a sort of explanation of the reasons for his visits, and it must be for the jury to decide whether that explanation was satisfactory. For his own part he was of opinion that Mr. Fraser would have done much better to have availed himself of his privilege as a suspected person, and reserved his statement until later on. However, he had elected not to do so, and, of course, must take the consequences.

It was a very significant fact that the pistol found in the deceased lady's room, and the one discovered in Mr. Fraser's bag, were evidently a pair, and Mr. Fraser had professed himself unable to account for this very singular coincidence. Also, it must be borne in mind that when arrested he was on the point of leaving the country, and the jury could put their own interpretation on that circumstance.

Another thing to be remembered was that on the night of the murder Mr. Fraser says he left the Lodge at half-past seven. Now, if that were so, and he wished to get back to London that same night (and after events proved this to be the case), he would have had ample time to catch the mail at Wyndham-

atowe; but whether he did not really leave the house at the time stated, or whether he was afraid of being recognised at Wyndhamstowe station, and therefore chose to walk to the larger one of Blackminster where there was less chance of his being noticed, could not be said; but as a matter of fact, he caught the last train at the latter place; nor does it seem, from his own admission, that he fulfilled the purpose for which he originally came down, which purpose he declines to explain.

There could be no doubt that the murder was committed with the long bladed dagger found at the side of the unfortunate woman, and it might be that this dagger would prove an important link in the chain of evidence by-and-by; but at present no one had identified it.

He did not think there was anything more for him to mention, and it would be for the jury to say what their impression was with regard to the manner in which the poor creature met her death. A fuller inquiry would presently be made into all the circumstances of the case; and, in the meantime, the jury must give their verdict.

He ceased, and the twelve men composing the jury spoke together for a few minutes. Presently their foreman gave the verdict, and it was this,—

"Wilful murder against Roy Fraser!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

ALTHOUGH the verdict came upon Roy and his friends as more or less of a shock, it cannot be said that it was altogether a surprise, for from the very beginning it had seemed pretty clear that no other would be returned.

"Never mind, old fellow," whispered St. Croix, with deep compassion for poor Roy's whitely despairing face; "this sort of inquiry means just nothing at all, and when you are before the magistrates it will be quite a different thing."

"But will amount to the same in the end," the young man muttered. "Even I can see how terribly facts are against me."

"The evidence is purely circumstantial."

"But that evidence is the hardest of all to contradict," observed Fraser, with a faint smile, and he was then taken back to the country jail, there to remain until he should be brought up for examination before the magistrates.

Before the company separated Squire Wyndham came up to St. Croix, followed by Geoffrey—who was indeed his veritable shadow.

"This is a sad case—very sad," he remarked. "I hope young Fraser won't be so obstinate as to refuse to tell his purpose for coming down here, otherwise I am afraid the Grand Jury will be as hard on him as this one has been."

"Of course it's all nonsense," broke in Geoffrey, with a sneer. "If he could have given a satisfactory reason you may be quite sure he would have been only too glad to do it. Still, his excuse was an awkward one—while he was about it, he might surely have invented a better."

The Squire looked uneasily pained, while St. Croix honoured the speaker with a cold stare, which brought a red flush of anger to Geoffrey's cheek.

"I haven't the least doubt Fraser will be able to prove his innocence," observed the Viscount, addressing himself to the Squire, and calmly ignoring the presence of Geoffrey; "you may be sure that his motives for silence are good ones, and ones that an honourable man would at once appreciate. I must ask you to give me an order to visit him in jail to-morrow."

"Certainly—certainly, and I only hope you will bring him to reason."

But although St. Croix spoke thus assuredly, he was by no means so hopeful as his words would seem to indicate, and as he and

Barclay drove back to Woodleigh Court together he said,—

"Things look black for Roy."

"You are right," was the emphatic response, "about as black as they can look, and if they present the same aspect at the Assizes as they did this morning I am afraid there can be no doubt whatever as to the ultimate verdict."

St. Croix turned a startled face upon him.

"Do you mean he will be condemned to death?"

"In all probability, for he can hardly fail to be found guilty, and there are no extenuating circumstances to soften the sentence."

"I'll save him if I can!" exclaimed St. Croix, with a sudden burst of unusual energy; and in the afternoon he and Barclay, and Wise, had a consultation together in the library, and the last mentioned gave his opinion on the case.

"I was at the inquest this morning, and I heard the evidence, and I saw the prisoner, and I don't believe he is guilty," he said, dogmatically. "He don't look like a guilty man, and if he had committed the crime you may be sure he would have provided himself with a better excuse than the one he gave—or rather, the one he declined to give—for he's had plenty of time to think over it since he was arrested. Then, if he really had any connection with the lady, and wanted to keep it secret, he wouldn't have brought her down here where he was known—of that you may make certain. As regards the pistol—well," the detective scratched his head, and looked puzzled.

"I confess I can't quite make it out, but the thing is to try and trace those pistols, and also the dagger. Still, it's my impression that supposing the guilty man knew the lady had a pistol of which his own was the fellow, he wouldn't have provided himself with that very weapon, but would have quietly dropped it into the Thames, or have got rid of it in some other way. That dunderhead, Manning!" the detective spoke the name with great contempt, "thinks he has done a fine thing in getting up the case, and arresting Mr. Fraser; but he's a stupid, conceited ass, who doesn't even know the alphabet of his profession!"

St. Croix declined the discussion of Mr. Manning's intellect, and brought the conversation back to the point again.

"Well, if you can find out the real culprit, and get Fraser off, I promise you five hundred pounds."

The detective's eyes glinted. His weak point was money, and perhaps Harold knew this.

"All right, my lord, I'll do my best, of that you may be sure; but I've a good many irons in the fire just now, and if it comes to a question of going abroad I shall have to decline."

"Going abroad! What do you mean?"

"In search of evidence. It may come to that, you know, for the lady evidently was not English. To me, one singular point in the case is that no letters or papers were found at the Lodge. The murderer, whoever he may be, must have taken possession of them either before or after the commission of the crime. Ah!" exclaimed Wise, with a sigh, "if we could only find out the other woman in the affair! For, of course, there was a second, and it is on her account Mr. Fraser is so reticent."

St. Croix started violently. A sudden idea had occurred to him with the force of conviction.

"You evidently guess who the lady is, my lord," remarked the detective, who had been quietly observant of his change of countenance, "and it would aid me very considerably if you would mention it to me."

"I don't know that I have any right to do so. My suspicion is not a certainty."

"As you like, my lord; only when your friend's life is at stake, you might surely strain a point."

"Yes," added Barclay, who had up to the present been silent, "I agree with Wise."

"Well, then," said St. Croix, but still with some hesitation, "I was wondering whether there was any love affair between Fraser and Miss Wyndham."

There was a moment's silence; then Wise got up in some excitement.

"You have hit it, my lord, there is no doubt about that, and she must save him!"

"Still," added Lord St. Croix, who was evidently ill at ease at having in a measure been the means of introducing Marjorie's name, "you must be careful not to let Miss Wyndham suffer any annoyance. Fraser is quite right to keep back her name, even if he suffers annoyance by withholding it."

"Annoyance!" repeated the lawyer, drily. "It seems to me that the risk of hanging is something more than annoyance."

"You leave it to me, my lord," said Wise, with confidence. "I'll take every care possible, and I'll also take the responsibility. I'll lose no time about it either."

This conversation took place on the afternoon of the inquest, and immediately after leaving the Court, Wise went in the direction of Wyndhamstowe, and at length found himself in front of the police-station, at the door of which Manning was standing, his hands clasped behind his back, and an expression of satisfied well-being on his face.

He recognised the London detective, and showed himself by no means averse to a chat.

"I congratulate you upon the skill with which you have found out the murderer," observed Wise, who was politic enough to know the value of flattery. "I suppose you have no doubt that Fraser is the murderer?"

"None whatever," replied Manning, with conviction; "there is no room for doubt."

"Poor fellow! Then you think he'll be condemned?"

"I'm sure of it. Did you hear what the coroner said?"

"Yes. His summing up was dead against him, and I don't know that it was unfair, either."

"Facts, you see—facts are stubborn things, and difficult to get over. Of course, at the trial, a clever counsel may do a good deal, but even he can't make white out of black."

"Just so. Now, what do you consider the strongest point against him?"

"The pistol!" promptly responded Manning.

"Ah! I should like to see that pistol. Could you show it me?"

"I can show you the pair if you like. Come inside, and I will do so."

Wise followed him indoors, and then Manning unlocked a drawer, and carefully took from it the pair of pistols, and also the dagger with which the crime was committed.

Wise examined them with the minutest attention. There could be no doubt that the pistols were a pair, for they were precisely similar in every particular; and after he put them on one side he took up the dagger, and bestowed an equally careful scrutiny upon that.

"This dagger was meant more for ornament than use," he observed, still holding it in his hand, "and probably has only been used once. See how bright the blade is, except where the blood still stains it! It has been carried in a sheath, I should imagine."

Manning regarded it with eyes of owl-like seriousness, and then shook his head. The question had no interest for him now that he had, as he supposed, unearthed the murderer.

Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that he would have been disappointed if Roy's innocence could have been proved, for it would have been a reflection on his own acumen, and would have taken the glory from the feat which he hoped would be instrumental in securing for him rapid professional advancement.

He put away the weapons rather hastily.

"I don't see that it matters much whether

the knife was carried in a sheath or not. We've got evidence enough already without trying to get more."

Wise put up his hand to conceal a smile. He felt himself so immeasurably superior to this country policeman.

Independently of the reward he would obtain it would be worth something to prove Manning to be entirely in the wrong.

At the present moment, however, it would not have accorded with his plans to let his companion see this—and, indeed, he rather blamed himself for having said so much.

"Oh, of course—of course!" he returned. "When you have a strong chain of circumstantial evidence, it is not worth while making it longer—that is to say, if each link is perfect, and fits well in with the next. But I am interested in the case, and, as I said before, I very much admire the way in which you have conducted it. By the-way, it is strange you did not find any letters or papers about the house—don't you think so?"

"Fraser disposed of them—of that you may be sure—for fear they should throw light on his relations with the murdered woman."

"You think he was her lover?"

"I've no doubt of it, and of course it was through him that she got to know of the Lodge, and came here to live. Then perhaps she grew troublesome—wanted him to marry her very likely, and so the end came."

"Ah!" muttered Wise, thoughtfully.

"All that will come out at the trial," added Manning. A coroner's inquest is a poor sort of thing, where the evidence is all higgledy-piggledy, and you're not quite sure of your ground. But the inquiry before the magistrates is quite another thing, and the Assizes too. I tell you facts are dead against Mr. Fraser, and if he escapes there is no justice in England!"

Manning delivered himself of this sentence with much dignity, and Wise appeared duly impressed.

"Quite right, Mr. Manning—quite right. You ought to be in London instead of wasting your time down here. We haven't too many clever men in the force, you know."

Manning bowed, much flattered by the implied praise.

"You do me proud, Mr. Wise—you do me proud, sir," he observed. "Shall we go round to the Wyndham Arms and have a drink? I'm off duty now?"

Wise acquiesced, and they thereupon adjourned to the inn, where they were regarded with much respectful admiration by the company assembled, who looked upon them as eminent public characters, who knew all about the Wyndhamatow murder; and who, by virtue of that knowledge, were far removed from the ordinary rank and file of humanity.

After the "drink" was over, Wise suggested going round to the Lodge, and as Manning made no objection, they went together, although the latter was somewhat surprised at the proposal. Perhaps he would have been yet more surprised if he could have known Wise's movements after they separated, for the detective went immediately to the cottage occupied by Bessie Webber's parents, and there had a long talk with the girl, who was by this time quite used to answering questions concerning her late mistress.

"Now," said Wise presently, and after a good many inquiries had been replied to, "did Mrs. Fanning ever write letters?"

"No, sir; at least, I never posted any for her."

"But she did write occasionally?"

"Yes, I think she put down what was spent in the house."

"Had she a desk?"

"No; but she had a little leather writing-case—a curious looking thing it was, and I fancy it must have been foreign, for I have never seen one like it."

"Where did she keep it?"

"In the sitting-room, on a little table at the window."

"Used she to keep it locked or not?"

"Locked—always."

The intelligent reader will see that Wise had already obtained two items of information that day which might prove of importance. The first that the knife with which the poor woman was stabbed had been kept in a sheath, and the second that a writing case, in which were probably various letters that might help to identify her, was missing.

Now, as he was well aware, it is rather difficult to cause things to disappear at will, especially after a crime has made people on the alert; and it might be that those two articles were still in the possession of the murderer.

On the other hand, he might, of course, have contrived to get rid of them before inquiries were set a-foot; but Wise had satisfied himself that no papers had been burned on the night of the murder, for an examination of the grate, in which ashes still lingered, had been made, and not a scrap of charred paper had been found. Now, a quantity of letters—and in all probability there were a good many—could not be destroyed without leaving some traces; while the burning of a leather writing case would cause a smell which would be sure not to pass unnoticed.

After he left Bessie Webber he was by no means dissatisfied with his afternoon's work, and the next thing he proposed to himself was an interview with Miss Wyndham, to which he looked forward with some anxiety, and a good deal of hope.

(To be continued.)

OH! GIVE HIM BACK TO ME!

—O—O—

CHAPTER XL.

CHEWING THE CUD.

"DINNER's just ready to be served, ma'am, and you've never been up to dress."

Mrs. Milton's voice roused Violet Sartoris from the stupor into which she had sunk, when Mr. Armitage had at last been induced to leave her.

Receiving no answer, Mrs. Milton advanced till her plump face came round the corner of the Indian screen, and her round eyes tried to see in the darkness.

Presently she felt her way to the fender, and picking up the poker and applying it vigorously to the fire, produced a splendid blaze.

"Lord ha' mercy upon us!" she exclaimed, in a fright, as Violet slowly raised her bent head, and looked at her with dazed eyes, as if she had just been woke out of a terrible nightmare. "What is it? Oh, dearie me!" beginning to shake. "It's nothing new turned up, is it—no fresh calamity?"

Violet pushed back her hair.

"Is it late?" she said, quietly.

"It's just upon half-past seven, and the soles are done to a nicety. Cook is in a grand fidget, as you may think. But ain't you well, ma'am?" peering at her mistress with kindly but inquisitive eyes.

"I don't know," slowly. Then more excitedly, "I wish I were ill—I wish I were dying!"

"For Heaven's sake, ma'am, don't say that, or it'll break my heart! It's all along of that Mr. Armitage, I'd warrant. I told Webster that he had done the sinfulness thing in letting him steal in upon you without a 'by your leave,' or anything. It was enough to startle you, my poor dear; but don't take on. He shan't come again, that I promise you, as sure as my name's Milton. Now, come and wash your hands and freshen yourself up a bit," in a coaxing voice. "The dinner won't pay you for the trouble of eating it, if you wait to change your dress."

"I can't eat; I should choke. Send it away!"

Mrs. Milton was aghast.

"Send it away! and there's some of the beautifullest partridges that ever gave up their lives to feed a lady's table! Mr. Landon would be in a fine way if he knew you despised the trouble of eating them. Come, dearie, let me beg of you, for your poor old servant's sake, to eat a mouthful. I'll bring it in here on a tray, and tell them you are not well to-night."

She bustled out of the room without waiting for an answer, knowing that a trouble never grows less because accompanied by bodily exhaustion.

Touched by her kindness Violet was obliged to eat some of Cyril's partridge; but it is doubtful if she could have told the difference between the wing of that nice little bird, or the flesh of a wild buffalo.

Always before her was the face of Ralph Armitage, with that unholy fire in his eyes, that nervous twitching of his under-lip, that deadly pallor on his cheeks.

He had gained such a power over her by the mastery of his will that she had yielded; but it was through fear for him that she had consented to be his wife, and now through fear for herself she was dismayed.

Common-sense told her that she could scarcely be held accountable for a promise given in a moment of uncontrollable excitement, when her mind had almost lost its balance; but her conscience she knew would call her to account for his death, supposing that Ralph trusted to that promise, and killed himself in despair when he found it was broken.

She had been mad and wicked, and hottest blushes dyed her cheeks as she wondered over her sudden fancy for Mr. St. John. It cut her to the heart to think she could ever have felt a passing love for any man but her husband.

It must have been an infatuation in both of them.

She remembered that night of the rehearsal, when he trampled on Cyril Landon's roses, and called her so passionately by her Christian name, and that other night when he actually struck Cyril down in a fit of mad jealousy, and told her she must choose between them.

Of course, she had been right to stick to her old friend, though she knew that her heart was throbbing for another; and he had gone and made no sign, and she had quite forgotten him in her grief for her husband.

She had only really liked him because there was a look in his eyes, a smile on his lips, which, somehow, always reminded her of Jack. Some day, perhaps, Mr. St. John would come back and wonder why she had married Ralph Armitage, and never know the true reason. She would die of shame if it ever came to his ears that she had been obliged to confess her love for him, before Mr. Armitage would consent to go and save him. Was it because he was angry with her that he had refused to come back, and preferred to stay in a horrid little station, rather than be under the same roof with her?

It was so very strange, for he must have guessed that it was she who sent Mr. Armitage to look for him, and he would naturally have taken it as the greatest *amende* she could make. Surely if she had been free, and he had just made her an offer, she could have done nothing more to prove her love—and yet he had stayed away!

It struck her as so odd, but she did not mind it now. It proved that he had never really loved her—and yet that day in the garden, when he lost his train so willingly, just for the pleasure of talking to her, and tore to pieces a new glove to tie up her flowers—he seemed to like her *rather*.

But why was she thinking of him to-night? Perhaps, because he seemed so connected with Ralph Armitage—he hated him so, he was so angry to think that he had ever saved her life

he was so indignant he paid her the smallest attention.

And those theatricals! What quarrels there used to be over them. And Mr. Armitage—how he set his heart on playing the part of Captain Archer, and told her that Mr. St. John was an impostor, and that he would have him arrested if he attempted to act with her. She hadn't thought of it for ages, but now it all came back to her as if it were yesterday, although it was more than a year ago. They hated each other—those two men, and she had sent the one to save the other.

Perhaps Mr. Armitage never gave the message; perhaps he invented another of quite a different purport. But nothing mattered now; but she would have liked to retain Mr. St. John as a friend, to have him dropping in every now and then, that she might look at his blue eyes, and think of Jack's! Her heart was dead, she could never love anyone again; but she would have liked one friend to watch over her in the dark and awful future—that future from which she shrank, as from some visible horror standing straight before her—one who would understand and sympathize with her in all her doubts and fears; one who would always be ready to shield her with the whole strength of muscle and brain, if danger really threatened her.

He would have been just the tower of strength that she needed, with his firm, downright common sense—his indomitable will, his courage which knew no fear; but he had deserted her, and she was left to anyone who would take compassion on her.

Lord Belfeather was still away, though his quest was over before it was begun. He had written one short letter of condolence as soon as he heard the sad news of Jack Sartoris's suicide. It was short because he scarcely knew how to express himself under the peculiar circumstances; but the few words of hearty sympathy were better than a whole room of studied sentences. Now she was free, and he could regard her as his goddess without feeling there was the smallest sin in his silent worship. Silent for the present, but not for long.

When the year of mourning was over, what was there to prevent his rushing down to the Priory, and laying his coronet and his foolish young heart at her feet? Nothing, absolutely nothing. The Duke might say that he ought to ally himself to a noble house like his own, but the Marquis would not see the necessity.

Their house could stand alone without any props from outside. Thank Heaven! he was not obliged to sell himself to some ugly girl with a long purse, in order to have money enough to keep up his title. He was quite independent, and he could follow his happy fancy wherever it chose to take him, so long as it was not into a sphere where refinement ended and poverty began.

No one could say a word against the beautiful Mrs. Sartoris as to birth or breeding, and every breath of scandal should be stifled when he made her a marchioness. He kept out of England because he knew it was too soon to speak, and he felt he could scarcely see her, and hold his tongue. She would see the love in his eyes, and before he knew it, it would come welling up on to his lips, and he would make a fool of himself just at the wrong moment.

No, it was better for him to be away, so he pursued his sport in different countries, always with his eyes wide open, to take note of any other sportsman who came across his path, although he had been told by his mother that Mr. Sartoris lay at the bottom of a fathomless lake in France. He told himself that he had got into the habit of spying at everyone like a detective, but as nothing ever came of it, it could do no harm.

And before long he could start for England, and claim the prize he was longing for. She would look upon him then as rather more than a friend, and call him "Belfeather," in that sweet low voice of hers, that added a charm to every-

thing she said. The very thought of it made the blood thrill in his veins.

He felt almost sure of her, for no one could make love to her until she had recovered from the first shock of widowhood, and there were no rivals in the field that he knew of. Little guessing the truth, he thought that no one could look upon that fellow Armitage as a rival.

The mere sight of his gloomy face was enough to scare away even a thought of love; and he knew that Violet Sartoris liked courtesy and a gentle bearing, and could not endure his rough, fierce ways.

True, she had seemed afraid of him, almost as if he had a hold upon her—such as a villain is apt to obtain over a defenceless woman. But, thank goodness! Violet was as far from being defenceless as any well-protected woman in London.

There was Landon always devoted to her service for old friendship's sake—there was he himself ready to lay down his young life for her if the gift could add in any way to her happiness, and a number of others whom he could check off on his fingers.

And so the Marquis of Belfeather made his plans, as he shot his game, and never doubted that he would realize them all, though all his flowers of hope were destined to be withered by the frosts of reality!

CHAPTER XLII.

CYRIL TO THE RESCUE.

"I NEVER heard of such a thing in my life. It's monstrous—utterly monstrous," cried Lady Stapleton, her face flushed with passionate indignation, her hands trembling, as a novel dropped from her loose grasp on to the floor.

Violet had contrived to keep her engagement secret for a few weeks after her aunt's return from her visit to London; but Lady Stapleton had scented mischief directly she heard of Ralph Armitage's arrival on the scene, and connected her niece's altered looks with his sudden appearance.

For weeks she waited, hoping that Violet would be the first to speak, and turning over in her mind all that she knew about him. She quite well remembered the fact that he had gone out into the storm to save Mr. St. John, and that she was afraid at the time that he had executed hard conditions. But the reality surpassed all her previous anticipations, and she could not believe that Violet would be foolish enough to accede to them. That she should have accepted an offer of marriage from anybody was extraordinary, when her husband had only been dead about nine months; but that it should be one from Ralph Armitage was almost beyond belief. She fretted and fumed, she scolded and expostulated, but it all was of no use. Violet hung upon her neck, and begged her not to turn against her, appealing at once to her affection and compassion, but saying that she could not help herself—it was not to please herself, Heaven knew, but marry him she must.

Then when Lady Stapleton changed her tone, and besought her to listen to an old woman's prayer, to one who loved her like a mother, Violet could withstand her no longer, but sobbed out the truth on her shoulder.

"I made the promise long ago—when I was half mad. Of course I needn't be bound to it, but he has clung to it—lived on it all these months, and he swears that he will kill himself if I break it."

"Is that all?" cried Lady Stapleton, with a breath of deep relief. "Why, my love, how could you be so foolish? People who say they will kill themselves never do. If I belonged to an insurance office I'd insure his life to-morrow with the greatest pleasure. Dry your eyes, and come out for a drive before it is quite too late, and don't trouble yourself again about a

wicked scoundrel who ought to be skinned alive!" she added, with great emphasis, although she was as kind-hearted as any creature, male or female, that ever lived.

"But, auntie, it was really a solemn promise, made at one of the most solemn moments of my life," a tinge of colour rising into her pale cheeks, as she thought, with a momentary sense of shame of the real motive for that promise.

"Nonsense, my dear, no promise could bind you to a madman, and I'll get Mr. Armitage lodged in an lunatic asylum before he ever makes you into his wife. Now, come and let us call upon Mrs. Ingham."

Violet consented to paying the call, but nothing would persuade her to break her promise, and Lady Stapleton, though she spoke so stoutly, felt her heart sink at the possibility of the pledge being kept.

"Send for Cyril Landon," that was the specific in the Mayno family when any member of it got into a difficulty, and Lady Stapleton being nearly allied to it through her sister, thought she might just as well employ it for her own comfort and support. Therefore, secretly, and without a word to her niece, she wrote a line to Cyril, imploring him to come to her to give her a word of advice; and then not being able to invite him to Violet's house without her concurrence, she managed the matter very diplomatically with his mother-in-law.

Mrs. Ingham thought it most natural that anybody should wish to consult Cyril—whether about love, law, trade or religion. She had the sublimest confidence in his common sense and superior judgment, and was, moreover, delighted to have a visit from him under any pretext. So his bed was prepared at the Rectory, and a special cake made for five o'clock tea at the Priory on the day that he was expected by Lady Stapleton and her faithful coadjutor, Mrs. Milton; and Violet's proposal to go out for a drive was snubbed with the greatest decision.

"The wind is so cold," said Lady Stapleton, with quite a hypocritical shiver. "I am sure we shall both be much better at home."

"But, auntie dear, you always say you are all the better for a breath of fresh air," expostulated Violet, quite unconscious of the plot against her, "and it is not half so cold as yesterday. I don't want to go without you, but I really do want some more wool, and I think I must go and fetch it."

"No, you shan't desert me. I shall be going away soon, and I'm determined to have as much of your society as I can. I will take a turn in the garden with you with pleasure."

"You must never talk of going away—I couldn't do without you," laying her hand affectionately on her aunt's plump shoulder.

"Very well, my dear; then you must say with Ruth, 'Your home shall be my home—your people shall be my people,' and come with me wherever I go. Heaven knows I shall be glad enough to have you."

There was something touching in the way these two waifs and strays, as they called themselves, clung to each other.

It seemed that ever since that disastrous wedding-day Lady Stapleton was destined to play the part of mother to her niece, and Violet felt as if she were the only person on earth to whom she could confide her real feelings.

Together they wandered up and down the garden, which, in spite of the care which the gardener bestowed on it, looked rather desolate and untidy under the influence of the autumn winds.

The beauty of the drooping willows and the silver beeches was all gone, and the river looked dull and dark and grey.

"I am quite ready to go in when you are," said Violet, with a smile; when a gust of wind had sent the dead leaves flying in all directions, and her spirit was falling with the gathering shadows.

"Yes, so am I; but we will take a turn to

the gate, and see if we can see anyone coming along the road. Even a butcher's cart would be better than nothing. Oh! the country is perfectly delightful in the summer; but give me a town with plenty of noise and bustle in the autumn!"

"Poor auntie! and you are sacrificing yourself for me!"

"Not at all, my dear; the rest is good for my health. I shall be a female 'Claimant' by the time we go off together to Brighton."

Violet had no intention of appearing amongst the crowds of the fashionable and frivolous in that most cheerful watering-place; but she did not want to vex her aunt, so kept her disinclination to herself.

They looked over the gate into the road, which was strewn with dead leaves, whilst the delicate branches of some hedges on the other side of a park-gating seemed in the wind.

There was no sound but the rustling of the leaves and the whistling of the wind. Not a single pedestrian was in sight; not a cart nor a carriage was to be heard even in the distance.

Lady Stapleton turned away with a vexed, disappointed sigh.

As she turned a cheerful voice exclaimed behind her—

"Why, here you are! I've been looking for you everywhere."

"Cyril!" exclaimed Violet, in extreme surprise, whilst Lady Stapleton, quite in a fuss of excitement, asked him where he had dropped from.

"Of course I didn't come like an ordinary person, by the road. What did you take me for?" he said, with a laugh, while he shook hands warmly with them both, and looked with eager eyes from one face to the other.

Violet also looked from one face to the other, as it dawned upon her that this visit was by no means a surprise to her aunt. This was the reason Lady Stapleton would not go out for a drive, and had been looking out anxiously at the gate.

She knew in a moment why he had been summoned, and tried to harden herself against his genial influence.

She was unusually silent as they walked back to the house, and felt quite cross when her aunt said with a deprecatory smile—

"Violet, darling, you go and take off your things, and leave Cyril to me for a minute—I've something to say to him."

"Oh! very well," with a slight toss of her head. "Pray keep him as long as you like. I much prefer the house on a day like this."

Cyril ran forward to open the glass door which led into the house, but she passed him by with a lofty bend of her neck, and regularly sailed up the stairs with the air of a duchess. He smiled as he turned to the widow.

"You've got me into terrible hot water. I'm dying to know what it's all about."

"Nothing to laugh at, I can assure you," taking his arm, and leading him towards the shrubbery. "Only imagine what that poor deluded child has done?" sinking her voice to an awe-struck whisper.

"What? I'm all curiosity!" expecting to hear that Violet had refused to make any use of Jack Sartoris's large fortune, as he had discarded her during his lifetime.

This he knew to be her fixed determination, and he thought it had just been revealed to her aunt.

He knew it would cause an outcry in the Mayne family; but he honoured Violet for adopting a course he felt was the only honourable one, and he had come up on purpose to stand by her through thick and thin.

His surprise, therefore, was great when Lady Stapleton said slowly—

"She has engaged herself to Ralph Armitage!"

He literally staggered, as if he had received a blow, and all the colour went out of his face.

"Impossible!" he gasped, after a minute's

pause, during which he had tried hard to collect his scattered faculties. "You can't mean it; the thing's incredible."

"I said just the same myself," shaking her head, sadly; "but it's too true. I would rather see her in her grave."

"So would I, a hundred times; but I know she doesn't care for him," eagerly. "Why, at your ball—don't you remember?—she made Belfather and me promise to watch over her, and keep him from her."

"I know; but don't you see that proves that she was afraid of him? Violet is not the sort of girl to be too shy to snub any man she disliked. He obtained access held over her the night of the storm at Holly Bank," she said, vaguely, knowing that she must not break a sacred confidence, and reveal the whole truth.

"Ah! that night when he went after St. John. I was always surprised at his taking the trouble, for I knew as a fact that he hated him like poison. Lady Stapleton, what is to be done?"

"We must talk her out of it; I would do anything on earth short of murder," she added, with a smile. "To prevent it. I declare I'll swear he's mad. There's a very odd look in his eyes which must convince any jury."

"There are odder things still in his life," said Cyril, gravely, "which might convince any woman, if I could only tell them to her—but it is mean to abuse a man behind his back."

"Oh, not at all!" said Lady Stapleton, quickly. "I could wish he had broken every one of the commandments, and if he had, I promise you that I wouldn't keep it to myself. My dear boy, my only trust is in you—you always had so much influence over her. Come in to tea, and then I'll leave you alone together."

"I shan't do a bit of good," poking a hole in the path with the point of his stick. "If Violet has got it into her head that it's her duty to marry the ruffian, not all the talking in the world will make her give him up."

CHAPTER XLII.

"I HAVE A RIGHT!"

TEA was over. Lady Stapleton had gone upstairs to take off her bonnet—a process which seemed to occupy her for some time; Cyril was standing with his back to the mantel-piece, his fair head bent towards Violet, who was sitting in her simple deep mourning, in a comfortable low chair just before him.

Her face was pale, and very sad, but it bore an expression of firm determination, although her fit of temper had quite passed away.

"When I say he is not worthy of you, that is only half the truth. I can't tell you all I know, or one quarter that I guess, but I implore you to give him up at once, if you have the smallest regard for your future happiness."

"I haven't much," with a small smile, "but I would have liked to die in peace."

"Nonsense about dying," he said, almost roughly, "why shouldn't you live and be happy like anyone else? Why should you sacrifice yourself to a scoundrel, who is sure to bring some sort of shame or dishonour on his name before he dies?"

Violet shivered, and getting up from her chair, came and stood beside him.

His feelings were stirred to the uttermost depths, and he could scarcely contain his rage and passionate disgust, as he looked down upon her pale, sweet face in its delicate refinement, and thought of its being soiled by Armitage's kisses.

"Don't be angry with me, Cyril," she said, pleadingly, as she laid her small, white hand upon his arm.

"You know how fond of you I am," he said, hoarsely, as he took her hand, and held

it between both his own. "After my darling wife, I am fonder of you than of anyone else in the world. I've always felt like a brother to you ever since you could toddle—I've been so proud of you, dear. You weren't like some of the other girls; you always held your head so high—now—now—" his voice breaking, "to think you will sink, drives me wild!"

"Oh don't, don't!" shaking from head to foot. "I know it all. I know it's sinking—if it ever can be sinking—to do one's duty; but I'm bound—bound, and I can't help myself."

"If you have bound yourself by a foolish promise he couldn't be such a cur as to keep you to it," speaking very gravely. "I'll go to him and explain; as your oldest friend I have some right, which even he might acknowledge."

"No; you mustn't think of such a thing!" a frightened look coming into her eyes; "promise me that you won't. Oh Cyril, you don't know what depends on it!"

"I do. I know that your happiness depends on it, and that is quite enough for me."

"If that were all I shouldn't care," lifting her eyes to his in passionate misery; "but now if the whole world spoke against it—if my father and mother, and Bertie and Gertrude cast me off—if you said you would cut me, I should still have to do it. Nothing and nobody can prevent me, unless by Heaven's mercy I died first."

"Violet!"

"Yes, I mean it," her very lips white as her pocket handkerchief.

"Tell me the reason!"

"No; it wouldn't be fair."

"Then let me tell you," looking down into her eyes, with fierce determination in his own, "if you won't stir a finger to save yourself, I will save you in spite of yourself. Marry him, you shan't!"

They faced each other with heaving chests and resolute faces, but it was as much as Violet could do to prevent herself from breaking down, and the next minute the tears came into her eyes, and her lips trembled.

"Mr. Armitage!" announced Webster, in a sepulchral tone.

The two friends started apart, and turned to the door, the one with a scared look as if a ghost were about to walk in, the other with the sternest expression that had ever been seen on Cyril Landon's handsome face.

He drew himself up like a new recruit being drilled, and glared at Armitage as he crossed the room, as if he would have liked to seize him by the collar. But Armitage's eyes were fixed on Violet alone, and he was scarcely conscious of Landon's presence. He held out both his hands, and said, tenderly in a tone of suppressed eagerness—

"How are you, dearest?"

She gave him the tips of her fingers, and in an icy tone, which contrasted strongly with his own, said quietly—

"Quite well thank you, Mr. Armitage. You see Mr. Landon has taken pity on us."

Ralph did see by this time, and all the tenderness went out out of his expression. He could not bear any man to come near Violet, for now that he was absolutely engaged to her, he was possessed by the fiercest jealousy. Still he was so far restrained by the conventional rules of society that he shook hands with him, instead of knocking him down as he felt inclined to.

Cyril stayed as long as he could, though he knew that Armitage wished him at Jericho; and Lady Stapleton came down from her room and sat enthroned in an arm-chair, looking as unbending as Mont Blanc.

Violet started politics as a tolerably safe topic of conversation, and was loyally supported by Cyril, who felt a kind of angry amusement in showing how agreeable he could be, even under adverse circumstances; whilst Ralph relapsed into gloomy silence, and Lady Stapleton was occupied in sternly ignoring him.



["DON'T TOUCH ME," VIOLET SAID, HOARSELY. "YOU HAD BETTER NOT, IF YOU EVER WISH ME TO BE YOUR WIFE."]

At last the dinner-hour at the Rectory drew so terribly near that Cyril rose reluctantly to depart.

Violet accompanied him to the door into the garden.

"You couldn't stay?" she said, the colour rising in her cheeks, for this was the first time she had ever departed from her rule of not asking him to dinner.

That rule was made to please her husband, who rested at the bottom of the French lake; and now it was broken because of the future husband who was waiting for her in the drawing-room.

Cyril hesitated, but after a moment shook his head.

"So many thanks, but I go home to-morrow, and I should be a Goth if I deserted them to-night. Good-bye!" He took her hand, and held it in his as he said gravely, "I shall leave no stone unturned to prevent this marriage;" then placing his hat on his head, ran across the lawn, waved a last adieu at the verge of it, vaulted lightly over the palings, and hurried across the fields.

Violet felt a feeling of defencelessness creep over her as she went slowly back to the drawing-room. She knew she must ask Armitage to dinner in common courtesy, but she would have given anything to have Cyril to support her. Now he was gone she felt as if she were at Ralph's mercy.

Armitage exerted himself to be as agreeable as he could in order that he might not forfeit a chance of being asked again.

He thought of that morning long ago—was it only a year and a-half?—when he saw her throw herself into the river, and plunged in after her.

Ever since those brief minutes when he held her in his arms, and her small brown head rested so helplessly on his shoulder, this fierce love had possessed him.

It had ruined his life, it had destroyed his peace on earth and his hopes of heaven, yet he

couldn't give it up. He would have torn a snake out of his bosom for fear of a bite which might put an end to his life, but he would not tear this passion out of his heart, though it might cause the death of his soul.

As he sat at dinner he watched her, following every graceful movement with glowing eyes. Her dress was simple black grenadine, open at the neck, the denseness of the black enhancing the exceeding whiteness of her skin.

Her ornaments were of jet, and there was not even one white rose such as a woman would naturally adorn herself with, in order to look well in the eyes of her lover; but to him she seemed lovelier than any other woman on earth, and his love attained volcanic heat, possibly because of the necessity for repression.

His opportunity came, when later in the evening, at a time when Lady Stapleton was off guard because she was nodding in her chair, he asked his hostess for a book, which she said she would fetch him from the library. Of course he followed close on her heels.

He waited till she deposited the candlestick she was carrying on a small table, and then coming close to her, he suddenly threw his arms round her, and drew her to his panting chest.

Before she could recover strength to free herself he kissed her rapturously over and over again, till half sick with disgust she wrenched herself free.

"How dare you!" she panted, feeling as if her heart would burst with rage.

His cheeks were flushed, his eyes flashed triumphantly.

"I have a right to kiss you! You forget that I am made of flesh and blood!"

"Do you forget that you are a gentleman?"

"No, but I mean to teach you what love is—not the sort of milk-and-water affair your husband felt for you when he cast you off for

a mere trifle—I love you, darling, as a man never loved before!"

"Don't talk like that," shuddering, "or you will make me hate you!"

"No; I will force you to love me against your will. Violet, listen to me," trying to take her hand.

She put both her hands behind her back. "Don't touch me," she said, hoarsely. "You had better not, if you ever wish me to be your wife."

"Will you never kiss me with your own lips?" a note almost like despair in his voice.

"Never—perhaps some day," she added, with a shiver. "Now go. I can stand no more to-night."

"You will call me 'Ralph' at all events?" "Not yet. If you worry me any more," in a tone of concentrated irritation, "I will tell Webster never to let you in again!"

He looked at her with passionate pleading in his eyes, and then with a bitter pain in his heart turned away, and slowly left the room.

Whilst she, utterly over-wrought and overcome, threw herself face downwards on the sofa, her soul writhing with mortification, shame and repugnance.

(To be continued.)

A FINE international exhibition of lace, tapestry, and other woven fabrics is now open in Rome, where Paris carries off the palm with a magnificent collection of Gobelin tapestries. There is also a specially interesting section containing historical relics, such as Napoleon I.'s mantle side by side with Garibaldi's cloak; a collection of gloves, from the fifteenth century down to the present time; and the wardrobe of Pope Innocent XI.



[OUTWARD BOUND.—"WHEN SHOULD I AGAIN SEE MY NATIVE LAND?"]

NOVELETTE.]

JANET'S SITUATION.

—30—

CHAPTER I.

I BELONG to an eminently genteel family—that much has been impressed on me from earliest childhood. I don't think the gentility of my descent ever brought me any tangible good, and I can well remember many a youthful pleasure and amusement of which it robbed me. I had three maiden aunts ever ready to repeat their warning, "Janet, you are a Kirkwood, and must not disgrace your family." I never remember any celebrated act of any dead-and-gone Kirkwood which entitled him to be held up as a model for his posterity. In fact, in spite of many a question put to my three aunts, I never elicited the slightest thing any of my ancestors had done to make me proud of them; and yet the homage to their memory was exacted from the time I was five years old, and forbidden to ride on a "merry-go-round" at the village fair, because it was not like a Kirkwood, until, more than fifteen years later, I was exiled from my native land for the simple reason it was necessary for me to earn my own living; and no female Kirkwood having yet degenerated into a bread-winner, I was decreed by the family that, since work I must, the further removed from them I did so the better.

But I am anticipating. My life until the time of my exile is very briefly described as dull. A "study in grey" is not a bad term for it. My parents died when I was three years old, and I fell to the care of my three aunts, with just sufficient money to give me a good education, and provide for me in all respects until I was twenty-one.

My mother (she was not a Kirkwood, you see, so could not be expected to think as they

did) had thought by that time I should be old enough to earn my own living. She was—I have heard from strangers—a woman of great sense and decision, and she preferred for her only child to be brought up with a liberal education as her capital, to the alternative of investing the one thousand pounds which was all she had to leave me, and letting me subsist as well as I could on the forty pounds a year it would have brought me in.

How my aunts condemned her; they had little more than forty pounds a year themselves; but the three incomes clubbed together, and in a little cottage they accepted, rent free, from a cousin—(N.B. There was nothing lowering to the Kirkwood pride in accepting things from relations, it was honest work which went against the grain)—contrived to keep up a very respectable appearance.

If only my mother had been of their way of thinking there would have been another forty pounds a year added to the establishment. They would have taught me themselves; and though it was twenty years since they opened a lesson-book, and education was not what it is now, surely they knew enough to teach a mite of a child of three years old! I fairly believe my poor mother's will had to answer for the very scant affection shown me by all my aunts.

The will was faithfully carried out. A lawyer, my mother's tried and trusted friend, was my guardian, and he apportioned my modest fortune as seemed best to him. For seven years I lived with my aunts, the interest of my little income being paid them for my support; then I was sent for five years to a good English school, and for five more to a French one, where (I fancy unknown to my aunts) the terms were considerably reduced in consideration of my instructing the French pupils in English. Finally, I came home, aged twenty and a half, with the best education that could be provided for me, and a hundred-and-fifty pounds in ready money.

"If you take my advice," said my lawyer friend, when I spent a day or two at his house in Bedford-place before joining my aunts, "you will make over the fifty to the old ladies, and spend the next six months with them. You ought to take breathing-space before you start on anything. Just vegetate at Fairleigh till next September; then, when you've made up your mind what you'd like to do, drop me a line, and I'll come down and talk to the old ladies. They're very foolish women, but they're the nearest flesh and blood you've got, and as their little savings must come to you some day if you keep in with them, I think you'd better put up with their peculiarities, and not quarrel."

"I don't want their money!" I said, with all the indignant independence of my twenty years. "I wouldn't stoop to thank them for it, Mr. Grant—I wouldn't, really!"

He smiled, not unkindly, but as one who rather pitied my impulsiveness.

"I don't think you need trouble your head about it at present. Miss Kirkwood is only fifty-seven, and her sisters younger; they all look like long-lived women. I fancy, Janet, by the time they are called upon to resign their money your views may be changed."

"Never!"

"Earning one's own living sounds delightful independence, Janet, but as a matter of fact, it is hard work for a woman."

"It is a hundred times better than useless, pretentious lives like my three aunts."

"Possibly, but I fancy you look at it through rose-coloured spectacles. When you are thirty, and have been earning your own living for ten years, I doubt if 'work' will seem to you quite so glorious."

"I shall never repent my choice, Mr. Grant, how can women make up their minds to live like my aunts; they must have been young and active once! How could they bring themselves to be content to live out all their days in the idleness of genteel pauperism?"

"I don't suppose they meant to live out their lives in Rose Cottage, Janet," said Mr. Grant, with a comical little laugh.

"But—"

"Miss Kirkwood was a very handsome woman, and both her sisters were fairly good-looking. No doubt they expected to marry."

"That's worse than all!"

"My dear girl, don't grow into a claimant of 'Woman's Rights,' or a railer against matrimony. I can stand almost any other of your vagaries, but I can't see your mother's child turn into that."

I stared at him.

"I don't want to. I dare say some women are quite right to marry, but I think it's perfectly despicable to look on marriage as a means of securing a home, and that's what you implied about the three aunts."

"Did I?"

"Certainly. You said they expected to be married, and believed Rose Cottage to be nothing but a temporary arrangement."

"Most women expect to be married."

"Then they ought not."

"Don't you?" inquired the old gentleman, looking at me half-comically. "You know, Janet, you'll never be a beauty like your eldest aunt, but still—"

I interrupted him angrily.

"I don't want to be a beauty, and I don't expect to be married. I think if anyone proposed to me I should think he had gone out of his mind."

On which my guardian laughed till he could hardly stop himself, and after that we decided I should go down to Fairleigh the very next day, my aunts having duly signified the pleasure it would give them.

I don't think up to this time the thought of my personal appearance had ever particularly troubled me. The last years had been busy—full of constant and agreeable occupation, and I had never seriously considered whether I was plain or the reverse; but the day on which I was to start for Rose Cottage I took an unnecessarily prolonged view of myself in the handsome pier glass which adorned Mr. Grant's spare room, and wondered for the first time in my life what verdict a stranger would have passed upon me.

I was of middle height and rather thin, but my complexion was fresh and rosy; my dark grey eyes sparkled with health and spirits, so that no one could have pronounced me delicate. My features were unremarkable, except the eyes aforesaid, and my hair, of a soft wavy brown, was long and thick; the front I wore short in fluffy curls on my forehead, but the back was plaited in a heavy coil and wound tightly round my head. I wore a dress of grey cashmere, which, bought and made in Paris, had an air of trimness and elegance in spite of its simplicity; a plain linen collar fastened by a large silver stud, and tiny linen cuffs at my wrists, completed my costume.

I gave a half sigh as I turned away from the glass. It seemed to me at that moment I would rather have been hopelessly plain or romantically ugly, for the one word which described me exactly was "ordinary." Out of a hundred girls there must be ninety just in my predicament, with just enough good looks to save them from plainness, and just too few to be termed attractive, or even pretty.

"Well, it does not matter," I muttered to myself, though I am bound to confess I sighed heavily the while. "I am quite good-looking enough not to frighten children by my ugliness, and as my life is probably destined to be spent in a succession of schoolrooms, it is, perhaps, just as well I am what I am, for I have heard ladies object to handsome governesses!"

I reached Fairleigh about five. All my aunts were at the station to meet me. I had not seen them for five years. I had spent that time in France, and my eyes had insensibly become used to the taste and fitness of Parisian dress. Never had my aunts' foibles struck me so forcibly. There was Winifred, the ex-beauty, got up like a bird of paradise in all

colours of the rainbow, till one's eyes positively ached with looking at her; Grizzel, the youngest (she must have been fully fifty-four) still attired as a very young girl, who must not aspire to anything but the simplest, most childlike of array; while Judith, the second sister, whom I liked best, and who always seemed to act as a kind of peace-maker between the other two, was evidently clothed entirely from the reversion of their joint wardrobe. Whatever was "too old" for Grizzel, whatever was not "grand enough" for Miss Kirkwood, was accounted quite correct for Judith. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the appearance of my second aunt was almost more ludicrous than that of either of her sisters.

I can see her now, as she advanced first of the three to meet me. Her rusty black silk bonnet was evidently hers only, because they had grown too shabby for Aunt Winifred; her hat, with its cheap cock's feather, must have been bought for Aunt Grizzel, and declined as "too old," and the jacket, remarkably too tight, had never been intended for Aunt Judy's ample proportions.

I don't quite know why, but I had always been my favourite of the trio, and as I kissed her warmly I did feel for one moment it was good to be among one's own kindred, and that no friends, however dear, can quite take the place of one's own flesh and blood.

"How you've grown!" said Miss Kirkwood, looking at me as though she thought it important of me to be a half-inch taller than herself. "But bless me, Janet, how strongly you're dressed!"

I might have returned the compliment, but I did not. I pulled my deep fur cape a little more closely together at the neck, settled a rebellious curl on my forehead, and observed that travelling usually made people look rather untidy.

"I did not mean that," my aunt was kind enough to explain; "but you might be a nun; there's not a scrap of colour about you, except those soft things in your hat. I did think, coming from Paris, you would give us an idea of the fashions."

"Perhaps Janet was too much taken up with her books," suggested Aunt Judith.

"Then she ought not to have been. Of all things I hate a blue-stocking; what good does too much learning do a woman I should like to know? It can't help her to dress her children, or keep her house."

"But if she hasn't any children," I observed mildly, "and hasn't a house!"

"Then I don't see the use of her being a blue-stocking unless, indeed, she is lost to all sense of decorum as to go out into the world and earn her own living."

I had meant not to hide my designs; I had thought myself ready to throw down the gauntlet at any moment; but, really, Aunt Winifred did put it so disagreeably, what a well-conducted girl—and at least I was that—would like to describe herself as "lost to all sense of decorum!"

"I'm sure Janet isn't blue!" interposed Aunt Judy kindly. "She doesn't look it."

"I don't feel it," I interposed, quickly. "And I have come to stay six months with you if you will have me," and then and there I bound myself to remain at Fairleigh until next September, offering my fifty pounds as an equivalent for any expense I might be to them.

They were very pleased. I could see that at once, but they refused the fifty pounds *in toto*. I should, they said, mournfully, require all I had, since my capital had been so recklessly expended; they would accept ten shillings a week just to cover the expenses of my board, but nothing more.

Then began a time which even now I can't look back to without a shudder. Mr. Grant had meant well in advising me to pay this visit, but if he had known all I was to suffer I doubt if he would ever have sent me to Fairleigh. The glories of the Kirkwoods, the gentility of the family, the extreme wickedness of

any of these descendants who did anything to infringe those glories and that gentility. Such were the favourite themes of my three aunts; while of useful conversation, Rose Cottage was as destitute of it as of any occupation that could by the greatest stretch of imagination be termed serviceable.

I remodelled the three best bonnets; I was allowed to cover the drawing-room furniture in some chintz which had been lying by for ages. I introduced some inexpensive French dishes which it cost me endless trouble to instruct the one little servant how to make, and when this was accomplished—it took perhaps a month—I sat down with folded hands, and began to find Rose Cottage was anything but an earthly paradise.

I wrote to Mr. Grant, telling him I could not stay the six months, and he sent me back a calm, amiable letter. It was then May; I could hardly dream on a career under a month. It would take some time to find what I wanted; then in the middle of July London would be empty, and even if I had found pupils—his seemed to take it for granted women's work meant teaching—I should be thrown on the world for two months while my employers went out of town. No; he emphatically advised me to stay where I was, to think quietly over my future, and to let him know my decision early in August. He thought that, with his assistance, I might hope to meet with something by October.

All this time my aunts had never inquired what I intended to do when I left them. They had ceased meddling at the idea of a Kirkwood carrying her own living. But they did not attempt to solve the problem of how a young woman, with no income and a hearty appetite, was to exist if she did not. They chose to ignore my plans after the first of September, and perhaps, on the whole, I was not sorry.

I took to spending a great deal of time out-of-doors. It was lovely summer weather, and Fairleigh was in a beautiful neighbourhood. It might be years, I thought, before I was at leisure another May and June, so I might as well enjoy myself while it was practicable, and store up the memories of places and hours spent among the birds and flowers wherewith to cheer the lonely winter evenings I might have to pass in some dull, unhome-like London school-room.

I was not an artist; I never had the least pretensions to be one, but I drew fairly well, and was very fond of sketching, so I used to take paper and pencil with me in those long rambles, and I have many a little picture stowed away now which I made in that long, lonely time when I was, as Mr. Grant expressed it, "making up my mind"—only that mind had been made up long before I came to Fairleigh.

"What a pretty picture!"

A young man stood by my side looking at my sketch. I had not heard his step, had not seen him coming, and I started as he spoke. I was not used to young men; though nearly one-and-twenty, I knew nothing of the species.

French schools are very carefully supervised, and since I left France—save for that short stay with Mr. Grant—I had seen no place but Rose Cottage. I don't know that my three aunts objected to men; I never heard them say so, but as none ever appeared at the Cottage I gradually began to imagine that they were among the many things with which it was derogatory to a Kirkwood to be acquainted; therefore, when I saw a young man not only stand near me, but actually speaking to me, I was fairly electrified.

He was not much my senior, and had a young, almost boyish, face. I liked his expression, it was so frank and open; and then the comical side of our both being there together seemed to strike me all of a sudden, and without in the least intending it I began to laugh.

To my surprise he laughed too. It was

quite wonderful how that joint laughter broke down our constraint.

I forgot I had never been introduced to him, and that it was a most improper thing to speak to strangers, and when he began to talk to me I answered him back again without a thought that such conduct was highly unbecoming in an intended instructress of youth.

"I wish you'd tell me why you laughed?" he said, presently.

"I couldn't help it."

"But I hope you didn't think it rude of me to look at your picture? I have watched you so often at church I seem to know you quite well."

It was my turn to stare now.

"I never saw you in church."

"I saw you. You sit with the three Miss Kirkwoods."

"They are my aunts."

"So I have heard."

"Where do you sit?"

"In the big square pew with red curtains, close to the pulpit."

"But that is Lady Tremaine's!"

"I know."

"And she hates society except clergymen and all sorts of odd preachers, and—you don't look like a preacher!"

"Heaven forbid!" he said, lightly; then then with rather an earnest look at me, "Do you actually mean, Miss Kirkwood, you don't recognise my unworthy identity?"

"I have not the least idea who you are; but you must be something connected with philanthropy or charity, or Lady Tremaine would never invite you to the Park."

"She did not invite me."

"Then I wonder you came; you can't have much proper pride."

"I flatter myself I have a good deal; but a fellow doesn't wait for an invitation before he goes to his own home."

"Tremaine Park can't be your home."

"How fond you are of contradicting. Now, do you know I always fancied it was? I was born there, and though my mother took me away before I was three years old, and I only came back this spring to celebrate my majority, I always looked on Tremaine Park as home."

The truth broke on me at last.

"Then you are Lord Tremaine?"

"I believe so."

"You might have told me before."

"I thought you knew it."

"How should I?"

"I have the pleasure of your aunts' acquaintance. They all three called on my mother to welcome me back."

"How very kind of them!"

"Wasn't it?"

"Yes, for they don't agree with the Countess at all. They think she is too religious."

"They are quite right. My poor mother is always the slave of some special minister. A very awful one is to the fore just now; in fact, he's so sure I'm going headlong to perdition that he doesn't scruple to tell me so. You know, that kind of thing's hardly polite to a man in his own house!"

"I suppose not."

"Miss Kirkwood, how do you get on with your old ladies?"

"They're not old. Aunt Winifred is in her prime, and Aunt Grizel has only just 'come out,' Lord Tremaine!"

He laughed.

"They must calculate somewhat differently to other people. I thought perhaps you were dull down here."

"I am dreadfully."

"So am I."

"Well, I suppose we both have our remedy, Lord Tremaine."

"What is it?"

"We can go away."

"I don't care to go particularly. I might have stayed in London for the season, but I didn't want to. I am going north with a shooting party in August; but till then I see nothing better than to stay here."

"I am going away in September."

"Where to?"

"I don't know."

"I suppose you will go abroad, or to the seaside; but I thought the Miss Kirkwoods never left Rose Cottage?"

"They never have since I can remember; it is I who am going away, not them."

"But you can't go all alone, you know!" said Lord Tremaine, opening his big, blue eyes.

"It wouldn't do at all."

"Why not?"

"No young lady ever travels about by herself."

"But I'm not a young lady—I mean I shall not be then."

"I wish you'd tell me what you mean."

"You had a coming-of-age this winter, didn't you, Lord Tremaine? I have heard my aunt talk about it—it was a very great ceremony; everyone was feasted and fêted, and there were fireworks, and dancing, and all kinds of amusements, and the meaning of it all was that you were one-and-twenty."

"How funny you put it! It wasn't half bad, you know, really."

"Well, next September I shall be one-and-twenty; there won't be any feasting or dancing, or amusements; but still I shall come of age just as really as if there were, and from that day forward I shall be free to do what I like with my own life."

"And what shall you like to do?"

"Work."

"Nonsense," and he took my hand quite like an old friend. "One of my mother's pet preachers must have got hold of you and talked to you about your latter end."

"I think not."

"You've no need to work; you're much too pretty. I don't wonder at your wanting to go away from Fairleigh and the old ladies, but you mustn't think of work."

I got up and collected my things.

"It is getting late," I said, succinctly. "I must be going home, or I shan't be in time for tea."

"I'll go with you," said Lord Tremaine, promptly. "Miss Kirkwood likes me; she's sure to give me a cup of tea."

"Don't you think you're very vain?"

"No," and he laughed again. "All old ladies like me; it's a kind of way they've got."

"I thought Aunt Winifred disliked all young men? None ever come to Rose Cottage."

"How long have you been there?"

"A month."

"Ah, Mr. Appleby has been away some weeks. He comes often enough."

"Who is he?"

"A doctor, who is quite sure one of the Miss Kirkwoods would make him happy, and has spent fifteen years in trying to ascertain which one."

"How very stupid!"

"Call things by their right names, Miss Janet, and his caution becomes prudence."

"I shall hate him."

"Your aunts do not. Let me carry that for you; it is too heavy for a lady."

We reached Rose Cottage, and I quite expected a scolding when Aunt Winifred opened the door and saw Lord Tremaine carrying my sketch-book, camp-stool, and portfolio as humbly as though he had been a hired porter.

Never was I more surprised than to see her smile blandly, shake the earl's hand as soon as it was freed from my possessions, and press him warmly to take a cup of tea.

"It is just brewed, Lord Tremaine. You must be glad of a rest after carrying those things for that naughty child; do come in."

He agreed, Aunt Winifred's manner to me was absolutely caressing. I came to the conclusion I had been quite mistaken, and gentlemen were not forbidden visitors, after all, at Rose Cottage.

When we got into the drawing-room Mr. Appleby was discovered talking to my younger aunt. He was introduced to me with great

unction, and I had much ado not to smile as I remembered the Earl's description of his conduct. I had full proof of its correctness, for never was anything more carefully adjusted than the division of the Doctor's attentions. If he sat between two of the sisters, was he not opposite the third? If he replenished the teapot for Aunt Winifred, did he not cut bread-and-butter gallantly for Judy, and ring the bell for Grizy? I own I felt annoyed with all my relations, they showed him so unmistakably they were each and all resolved to become Mrs. Appleby if he gave them the chance.

I thought it almost disgusting; but then at twenty one is a little hard upon elderly love-making. Then, too, as I had told Mr. Grant, I hated any woman marrying for a home; and what but a desire to exchange Rose Cottage and poverty for the Doctor's red-brick house and affluence could have induced the three sisters to pay such devoted attention to the little wizened old man who looked every month of seventy?

Lord Tremaine did not linger long; he begged Aunt Winifred to bring me some day to see his mother, and then he took his leave, and I think the Doctor felt a qualm of fear he might become an engaged man against his will if he lingered alone with his three suitors, for he speedily followed the Earl's example.

"My dear Janet," and Aunt Winifred kissed me quite affectionately; "you are a true Kirkwood after all!"

The other sisters beamed approval. I confess I felt unconscious of what I had done to merit it till my eldest aunt enlightened me thus:—

"He came of age in the winter—twenty-thousand a year if he has a penny; a nice pleasant young man, perfectly heart-whole, and no relations in the world to interfere; for his mother's so busy with her religion she's no time to think of anything. My dear child! it seems a perfect providence you met with him to-day. I can see he is impressed; if you are only careful and play your cards well you will be Lady Tremaine of Tremaine Park, a position worthy even of a Kirkwood!"

I never felt so ashamed of myself and my relations in the whole course of my life.

"I would rather starve," I cried, "than scheme to marry a man because he is rich; I haven't the least desire to be married. In fact, I think weddings a great mistake."

The storm blew over then. Lord Tremaine and I met often, and were fast friends. Before I had seen him three times he confided to me a hopeless attachment to a young lady he had met in Ireland. From that moment I felt safe I might have him for a friend, and he, at least, would never suspect me of wishing to be more.

So Lord Tremaine, a wealthy Earl, and I, penniless Janet Kirkwood, took many a walk, spent many an hour pleasantly together in that bright summer; and he told me about his lady-love until I felt almost as if I knew her. She was staying with an uncle in London till the season was over, and would then be in Yorkshire; and he was going there late in August for the shooting. He had promised his mother not to speak to Erin until he had proved the strength of his love for her by six months' separation, and that was why the open-hearted young nobleman kept in the dullness of his ancestral home. He could not go to London without meeting Erin, and he would not trust himself to see her until he could ask her to be his wife. I liked Lord Tremaine very much. In spite of his rank, in spite of his romantic attachment, there was something so irresistibly youthful about him that, instead of regarding him as one of England's hereditary legislators, never could help thinking of him as a boy.

Our intimacy was very pleasant, the more so because we both knew our friendship was safe to grow into nothing else. I think those weeks of summer idling were some of the pleasantest I ever spent. We suited each other;

he delighted to talk about his Erin, and there was something to me perfectly delightful in listening to the story of a real love affair.

"I don't think anyone but my aunts has ever dreamed as to the friendship. Lady Tremaine, I know, has not; she took a great fancy to me, and tried hard to make me enter what she called the 'narrow gate.'"

"I don't think she ever succeeded, but she always believed she was on the point of doing so, which made me a welcome visitor at the Park, where, strangely enough, I often, as time passed on, met Mr. Appleby, who was an old acquaintance of the Countess."

"Miss Janet," said Tremaine to me one day, when I had been lunching with his mother, and he was picking me a bunch of hothouse flowers to carry home, "I wonder if you would be offended with me for giving you a word of warning?"

His manner was so grave I began to think something dreadful was coming, and flushed hotly—a way I have when troubled.

"I don't think you would say anything unkind, my lord."

"You know I wouldn't. We have been such chums, but I see a most awkward affliction threatening you, and though I haven't an idea how to set about it I think I ought to warn you!"

I looked at him ruefully.

"Am I growing bald or blind, or anything like that?"

"Oh, dear no!" and he laughed quite merrily; "but really it's very serious. How I wish Erin were here; she'd make you understand by a hint. I am so clumsy—I must tell you in plain English!"

"I prefer plain English."

"That's right! Now—don't be vexed—do you know Appleby's in love with you?"

"What!"

"My dear girl, I put it plainly enough to you—Appleby's in love with you."

"I don't believe it."

"I do. I have expected for days that he had transferred his allegiance from the three Miss Kirkwoods collectively to the fourth Miss Kirkwood individually; but it's past doubting now, for he spoke to my mother."

"To the Countess?"

"Asked her to pave the way for him—to sound her dear young friend, etc. Janet, are you blind? Didn't you understand her ladyship's drift at lunch, when she asked you whether you preferred a town or country life, and whether you liked the society of people older than yourself? I felt quite angry with you, for you made your answers so delightfully vague. I am sure the matter would go and report to her *protégé* that you were quite prepared to listen to him, and that he might propose as soon as he liked."

"Lord Tremaine!"

"You promised not to be angry."

"It is too absurd!"

"Well, of course the fellow has shown good taste in preferring you to the old ladies, but I confess his presumption is somewhat strong."

"He must be seventy!"

"Probably."

"I shall not listen to him."

"I never thought you would. But, Janet," and the boyish face grew unusually grave and thoughtful, "have you thought at all of the storm which will break over your head?"

"No."

"I believe whichever of the three sisters he selected the other two would have buried their own hopes and accepted him as a brother-in-law."

"Well, they can do so still."

"Do be reasonable! If you refuse him they must know it. They'd be mad enough anyway, but still if you married him they'd gain a good house to visit at; a rich nephew (for he's made a lot of money), besides seeing their niece settled as becomes a Kirkwood. On the whole, though they'd be put out if you accepted him, their wrath would be nothing compared to the fury they'll shower on you if you refuse him."

"Which I shall."

Lord Tremaine smiled.

"Of course."

"It's no business of theirs!"

"I fear they will think it is. Come, Miss Janet, confess it will be a galling position to see the husband they have aspired to for fifteen years discarded by their niece. I fancy Rose Cottage will be too hot to hold you."

"I can go away."

"But where?" persisted the Earl. "My mother is so on Appleby's side she's safe to take your aunts' part. Then that lawyer friend of yours is sure to be out of town—lawyers always are in August—and altogether it seems to me you'll be in a fix."

"Well, I must get out of it."

"Couldn't you stave off Mr. Appleby's proposal till your guardian comes back?"

"I'm afraid not, from what you say. Mr. Grant will not be in town till the first of October. He wrote and asked me if I would postpone making any inquiries for a situation till then, as he had been ill and wanted a change."

"Two months hence. You might do it if you fought shy of Appleby."

"I'll do my best."

"I hate to hear you talk of a situation."

"It will be my best plan. You see I was educated for a governess, and so there's no hardship in being what I was always meant for. I shall like it a hundred times better than such a life as my aunts'."

Lord Tremaine's warning had not come a day too soon. That very afternoon Mr. Appleby met me as I was walking home, and before I knew what he was about had laid his heart and hand at my feet.

He was very frank; alluded to the disparity (he ventured to call it a slight one) I know it was fifty years) in our ages, but suggested his riches and my poverty more than balanced that.

He assured me he would settle the red-brick house and all his fortune on me, and that he would be a most indulgent husband. Finally he said he had applied to my Aunt Winifred as my nearest relation and received her consent to his entering the family.

I had the utmost difficulty in making him understand I rejected him. After having been angled for persistently for fifteen years by three Miss Kirkwoods with money, it must have seemed to him passing strange to be refused by a fourth without that useful appendage. However, I made it clear to him at last—and then I went home.

It is better to draw a veil over the reception which awaited my tidings. I don't think I shall ever forget the misery, the degradation, the loneliness, which seemed to assail me. I know I told my aunts I should leave them the next day, and earn my own living.

I think they retorted back they always knew I should disgrace the Kirkwoods, and weren't in the least surprised.

Then they changed their minds about the terms for board, and exacted the whole of the fifty pounds I had once offered. Then I went to bed.

Ill-news travels fast. Which of my aunts carried the tale to the Countess I can't tell you; but when my packing was finished the next day, and the old kitchen clock was striking twelve, a little note was brought me from her, and desired me to send my luggage to the station and go over myself to the Park, as she had something she wished to communicate to me.

I did not relish the interview. Neither of my three aunts appeared to say farewell to me, and I let myself out of the cottage with a very desolate feeling, and a consciousness I was in no humour to stand reproaches from the Countess.

To my surprise I received none. Lady Tremaine assured me I had made a great mistake; but when she had once said that, and delivered, as it were, her verdict, she seemed to busy herself more with the consequences of my ill-doing than the sin itself.

She informed me she had always liked me, and that so far from thinking "work" derogatory she deemed it a duty. Therefore, she was pleased to give me a note of introduction to a rather celebrated institution in London (which is a cross between a charity and a governess agency), where, she assured me, they would board me on very moderate terms, and she would also undertake to speak to my qualifications and respectability should I hear of anything likely to suit me.

Lady Tremaine was too simple-minded to know the extent of her kindness; she lived too retired a life to be aware of the precise value of a titled recommendation; but, all the same, she meant kindly.

Within four-and-twenty hours of my first proposal I was settled in Bartley-street, an inmate of the "Governesses' Home," my claim being that the Countess—a liberal subscriber—had recommended me, and that though not a governess, yet I was hoping soon to be one.

I began very hopefully. I had twenty pounds in my pocket, besides the hundred in Mr. Grant's keeping. I knew that as soon as he was back in town he would interest himself in procuring me a situation, and, with my qualifications, I saw no difficulty in the task.

Alas, for human expectations! I had not been a week in Bartley-street before I heard of my guardian's dangerous illness.

I had written asking to be allowed to see him. His sister wrote in reply. I fancy she must have cherished an instinctive dislike to me, for she said it was quite impossible her brother could answer a business letter for quite three months, and that she hoped I should, therefore, apply to some other friend to advise me.

Three months, and already my twenty pounds were melting!

I made a rash resolve I would examine the "books" of the institution the next day, and apply for every situation whose requirements I possessed.

I remember I wrote twelve letters, and that that they were to all parts of England. I had but one reply; it was from a clergyman's wife. She wanted to find a governess for her sister, who resided in South Africa.

The salary was fair—not enormous—the duties apparently light, and a comfortable home was specially mentioned as one of the advantages.

I merely put the letter in the fire, for I had not the smallest idea of expatriating myself; but on reflection it seemed to me rather a good plan.

In Africa, I thought bitterly, surely I should be far enough off not to disgrace my relations; besides, a very few interviews with intending employers had taught me that, like my aunts, many of them regarded governesses as a separate and distinct class, somewhat below their upper servants.

I had heard lots about "colonial ease," "colonial freedom," and I had a vague sort of idea that universal equality prevailed, and labour was thought honourable rather than otherwise.

I had not a single tie to my native land, not a single farewell it would pain me to utter, and so it seemed to me I was of all people specially suited to travel thousands of miles to instruct children I had never seen.

In this new mood I called on the lady with whom the selection of the governess rested, and she liked me, or said she did. I found she wanted to make a three years' agreement.

"I could not," I said, simply. "I think I should hate people if I knew, however much they disliked me, I was bound to stay with them three years."

Mrs. Warburton smiled.

"I don't think you will hate my sister. If you left under the three years you would not expect her to pay your journey home? The passage is a very expensive one."

"Oh, no! Besides, I don't think I shall ever come home. I hate England!"

"Don't say that! Then I will write to Lady Tremaine, and let you know her answer."

Lady Tremaine's reply was most satisfactory, and I was engaged forthwith. Mr. Warburton took my passage, and his wife placed ten sovereigns in my hand to pay the expense of my up-country journey. Her sister resided on a farm several miles from Grahamstown; she had no doubt Mr. Fraser would come as far as that town to meet me. She was quite sure I should be very happy.

I did not quite feel so sure. It was wonderful how fond I grew of England now I was to leave it! A week after I had expressed my hatred of my native land I had come to the conclusion it was the dearest place in the world, but I was a great deal too proud to draw back. Besides, what alternative had I? It seemed a choice between Mrs. Fraser's farm and starvation—of course I preferred the first.

Of course I wrote and thanked Lady Tremaine for her kindness, and she sent me back a splendid fur-lined cloak, to wear on the voyage, and a collection of tracts. I have no doubt she thought both very useful, though furs are about the last requisite of an African wardrobe. The Earl sent me a small travelling desk with silver fittings, and my monogram in silver on the lock. I have it still, and found it of far more service than either the cloak or tracts.

I think now I must have been half beside myself to set out so suddenly on that voyage. I knew nothing whatever of the Colonies, my whole ideas of Africa might have been summed up thus:—"there are black people, and it is hot."

The Frasers might have turned out tyrants; their farm might have been in the midst of some undiscovered swamp, and I could not have complained. I asked Mrs. Warburton not a single question, except the number of children and their ages. I took all else on trust.

I wondered a little dimly, as I stood on deck and watched the English coast gradually receding from our view, what my three aunts were about, and whether either of them had accepted the reversion of my repentant adorer; then I grew graver still, and wondered whether Mr. Appleby's was the only love that would ever be offered me.

I had not used to think much of such things. I fancy, indeed, I was a trifle hard and unromantic, but ever since I had known Lord Tremaine, and listened to his raptures about Erin, I had somehow changed.

Would anyone ever be as much wrapped up in me as he was in her?

Would anyone ever think the world well lost for my dear sake, and be ready to risk all—the loss of friends, of family, just for love of me?

I thought not.

Of course I was not pretty, and yet it was very hard if only pretty people were loved.

I had come to this point in my musings when I looked once more on the prospect. The last trace of England had disappeared, and we were out at sea. Ah, when and under what circumstances should I again see my native land!

I took with me at least two good gifts—youth and health. Now my history has all to come, what would it be like? What kind of a creature would Janet Kirkwood look when she returned at last to England?

CHAPTER II.

MRS. FRASER'S farm was situated at Wednesday's River, but whether that was the name of the farm, of the village round it, or of the whole district, I had not the faintest idea. Mrs. Warburton herself did not seem clear about the precise geography of her sister's abode. She always directed her letters Mrs. Fraser, Wednesday's River, Red District, and as they always got answered in due course, of course that was right. If I took the train to

Grahamstown no doubt Mr. Fraser would meet me there, and if he didn't the officials—she was evidently a lady with great faith in officials—would be able to tell me the best means of going on.

I had a very pleasant voyage. I proved a good sailor; then not having gone through any very painful parting, my spirits were very fair, so that I was quite cheerful enough to be ready to make friends, and I did make one or two very firm ones before we reached Cape Town.

My chief intimate was a lady who lived at this port, and when she heard my destination she declared I had much better come and stay with her for a few days, and then go from Cape Town to Grahamstown without touching at Port Elizabeth at all.

This lady, who was an old inhabitant, and knew African geography far better than poor Mrs. Warburton, declared that there was another station far nearer to Red District than Grahamstown. In fact, she entirely remodelled my whole route, and finally despatched a telegram to Mr. Fraser to tell him the exact time at which I might be expected.

No answer came to her despatch, but this she assured me was quite a matter of course. People were not methodical in Africa, and with them silence meant consent. If the Frasers hadn't been perfectly willing to have me on the day mentioned, and to come as far as Didderton to meet me, they would have sent word.

I own I felt the least bit uncomfortable. I had been engaged by Mrs. Warburton and she had mapped out my journey. In my dependent position had I a right to alter her arrangements? Would it not make Mrs. Fraser think me at least a little presumptuous?

My new friend, Mrs. Van Ran, laughed heartily.

"You have a perfect right to travel as you please; the Frasers ought to be glad to be spared the trouble. Didderton was ever so much nearer Red District than Grahamstown, and the station having only been opened a few months was, of course, the only reason Mrs. Warburton had not directed me to travel to it. Besides," continued the kind creature, "I knew Colin Fraser well, ten years ago, and I assure you he was the best hearted man I ever met. It would be quite impossible for him to take offence at such a natural change of plans."

"Do you know his wife?"

"I had never heard of his marriage. Perhaps he brought out a wife when he came back from England. I know he went home very soon after we lost sight of him."

This fitted in exactly. Mrs. Fraser's eldest children were twin girls of eight. Of course she had been married in England, and then come out to the Colony. Mrs. Van Ran seemed more interesting than ever now she could tell me something of my employers.

"He is awfully nice!" she said, confidently.

"You're sure to get on with him; he has a most romantic history. He was heir to some old English family, when his uncle suddenly took it into his head to marry his housekeeper and have a son. Colin had been bred to no profession or business, but he understood farming thoroughly, having been a kind of manager of the estate under his uncle. He had a few hundreds, which came to him from his mother, and he got on very well out here. Fancy Colin Fraser with a wife and family! Somehow, I never looked on him as a marrying man."

I spent a week very happily in Cape Town, then the time arrived for my parting from the Van Rans, and they all escorted me to the station, and saw me into the train. When I saw the carriages with the movable backs which came out and converted themselves into sleeping berths, I thought I had never heard of anything so funny. Mrs. Van Ran saw me ensconced in one of the lower ones, which, with a roll of shawls for a pillow, was anything but uncomfortable.

I begged to know if any sleeper mounted to

the upper berth whether he would not infallibly come through and fall with a crash on me, but they laughed and told me it was all right, and if I didn't fidget I should sleep as peacefully as in my bed at home.

We started; Mrs. Van Ran had put a black tarlatan bag over the lamp, so there was only a subdued light. We moved along at what seemed to me a funeral pace. I think if you divided the miles traversed by the hours occupied in the transit, there would be an average of twelve miles per hour; but then, as we came to a dead stop whenever the engine-driver felt inclined, and varied the monotony of the journey by long waits at the more important stations, this calculation is hardly fair.

I started with the firm resolution to keep wide-awake and never close my eyes. I felt sure I should be carried past Didderton, or that someone would clamber to the berth over my head, and in so doing come down and crush me.

But after an hour of the slowest progress I had ever known I began to get drowsy. It was ages before we were due at Didderton, and if I did take a little nap it would not last long. There seemed no chance of my solitude being invaded; it was certainly foolish to keep awake when I was tired, and then—the last of the argument was lost, for I fell asleep.

How long I slept I have no idea, but I am quite sure when I woke it was the middle of the night. I had a cold, sleepy sensation as I looked round. I wondered where I was, and what had happened; then, as I strove to rise, I knocked my head against the berth over mine, and before I had recovered from the shock had the supreme horror of seeing a man's foot dangle over the side, and hearing a very sleepy voice inquire,—

"What on earth's the matter."

"Oh!"

I have said "Oh" many times in my life before, but I don't think I had ever crowded so much surprise and dismay into that much-used monosyllable until that moment. My "Oh" must have been a little perplexing also to the listener, for in another moment the foot was followed by a leg, and before I knew what was coming a gentleman had leaped to the ground and stood confronting me.

It was the strangest meeting ever known. I was dimly conscious that my face was flushed and my hair ruffled. I was dressed in the soft grey cashmere in which I had travelled to Fairleigh, but a night's slumber must have rumbled it considerably; in short, I was conscious that I appeared at my very worst.

My companion was five or six-and-thirty; he wore a light tweed suit, and though I had evidently disturbed his dreams looked anything but ill-tempered. He had blue eyes, darker and more thoughtful than Lord Tremaine's, his face was graver too, and had lines about the mouth.

He stared at me in so much amazement that I thought, nervous though I was, I had better begin the conversation.

"I am very sorry if I've disturbed you," I said, calmly; "but I woke up in a fright."

"Nightmare, I suppose?"

"I don't think so. I couldn't remember where I was, and then I bumped my head."

"Which bumping had the effect of a small earthquake on my couch."

"I am very sorry."

"It's not worth being sorry about. Do you know it's daylight? Suppose we do away with all this business, we shall be more comfortable?"

Before I knew what he was about the props which supported the two upper berths were removed, and the berths resolved themselves into very comfortable padded backs for the seats. In fact, the carriage now looked just like an English one, except for the absence of the "arms" which generally divide first-class passengers from each other.

I had time now to feel embarrassed. Here was I alone at daybreak with an utter stranger, and, what was more, I was evidently

expected to be on friendly terms with him. I came to the conclusion Africa was a very strange place.

"You look tired to death," he observed, presently. "Have you been travelling far? I didn't see you when I came in?"

"From Cape Town."

"You are English, though?"

"How did you guess it?"

"I don't know. I have been out here a dozen years, and yet I can always detect a fellow-countrywoman."

"I am English; I only got to Cape Town a week ago."

"And how do you like the Colony?"

I pouted.

"Everyone asks me that."

"It's the correct thing to do, but I will change the form of the question. How long do you mean to stay?"

"I don't know."

"There are a great many young ladies come out as religious helpers in a Sisterhood—'workers,' I think they call them. I took you for one of them."

"Oh, no!"

He looked at me again.

"No, you are not the style, I can see now."

"I beg your pardon, do you mean I look as if I were irreligious?"

"Oh dear, no; but I couldn't fancy you wearing a black poke bonnet, and teaching dirty little children."

"I hope they will be clean."

"Who?"

"The children I have come to teach."

"Then you are a worker after all."

"Yes; but not in the sense you mean. I have come out to be a governess."

He looked at me again.

"I wonder what your friends were thinking about?" he said at last.

"I haven't got any."

"Nonsense!"

"I haven't got any near enough to care what I do with myself."

"No relations?"

"Three aunts."

"And what do they say?"

"They say I was born to disgrace the family, and I think, on the whole, they'd prefer me to do it in Africa than in England."

"And you—do you think work a disgrace?"

"No; but a good many people do."

"You don't look fit for much work. Where are you going to?"

"To the Frasers."

He started. I felt quite sure he knew the Frasers, and that in some way or other the idea of their having a governess surprised him, but he only said, quietly,—

"Do you know his Christian name?"

"Colin, I believe."

"And he lives at Wednesday's River Farm, Red District."

"Yes."

"How very strange!"

"Why?"

"Are you Miss Kirkwood?"

"Yes; how did you come to know my name?"

"About three days ago Mr. Fraser received a telegram from Mr. Van Raa, saying that Miss Kirkwood would be at Dodderton on Tuesday. Mr. Fraser being absent from home, though the message got to the farm three days ago, there was a delay in sending it on, and he only got it last night."

"Then he won't be able to come and meet me," I observed, dejectedly. "Well, never mind; I daresay I can find the way, and I must try and remember I am only a governess, and ought not to expect to be treated as a visitor."

"What nonsense!" said my new friend, irritably. "A lady is always entitled to consideration; and I'm sure Colin Fraser was awfully sorry about the delay of the telegram."

"You have seen him since then?"

"Oh, dear, yes! Fraser and I are great chums, Miss Kirkwood—what people call inseparable."

"And I suppose you know his house?"

"As well as I do my own."

"Then, perhaps," for in spite of my assumed courage I was quaking at the prospect of the unknown journey, "you wouldn't mind telling me the best way to get from Dodderton to Wednesday's River."

He looked more troubled than ever. My request seemed simple enough, but evidently it vexed him.

"Never mind," I said, proudly. "No doubt the officials will direct me."

He burst out laughing.

"I beg your pardon; but when you have once seen the solitary man at Dodderton I don't think you will dignify him by so grand a name. The station itself is a kind of wooden horse-box. A man comes up twice a day to collect and issue tickets. He spends about an hour at the place in all, and as for giving you information I don't believe it's in him."

I felt ready to cry just as the train stopped at a station of some importance.

"I am going to bring you some tea," said the stranger, in a much kinder tone. "It won't come up to the liquid you are used to call by that name in England, but it be will better than nothing."

He was soon back with a cup of something that was, at least, warm and sweet, if nothing else, and a plate of bread-and-butter.

"The only other comestibles are mutton-pies and jam-tarts, neither of which looked nice," he said, with a smile.

I had my little purse all ready, but he rushed off before I could inquire the price of my breakfast, and when a dingy boy appeared presently to claim the plate and cup he informed me "the gentleman had paid," so there was nothing for it but to put my purse back and try to feel grateful.

But gratitude doesn't come by trying. If this giant stranger would have promised to show me the way from Dodderton to the Frasers I would have been very thankful to him. It could not have been much more trouble than providing me with tea and bread-and-butter. But he had shown me most unmistakably he did not want to be bothered by my company, and so I felt irate, and if I had not been both hungry and thirsty I should have sulked and refused his generosity.

His face was grave when he returned, and he seemed more than ever perplexed.

"We shall be at Dodderton at two o'clock, Miss Kirkwood," he said, after a long silence, in which we had been whirled some distance.

"I am so glad—I feel tired to death of travelling. It will be such a relief to me to reach my destination."

"Have you any relations in Africa?"

"Oh! no; but then I have no relations anywhere who care about me."

"Poor child!"

"I am not a child!"

"What then?"

"A woman!"

He laughed.

"Pardon me, but no one would give you credit for it. When I saw you this evening looking at me with great frightened eyes you seemed the veriest baby I had ever met."

"Thank you," indignantly.

"Well, I like babies. If there is one thing in human nature I detest it is a strong-minded woman."

"Then you detest me?" I said, shortly.

"You don't mean you ever aspired to the title? Give up your ambition; nothing will ever make you into one of the 'masculine sisterhood.' Why, at this very moment I believe your heart is sinking into your shoes because I have told you there is no 'official' at Dodderton qualified to serve you as guide and escort."

Two tears rolled down my cheeks.

"I don't think it's manly to reproach me with my helplessness," I cried, indignantly; "can I help it if I have never been in Africa before? Can I help it if the people who are going to buy my labour don't think enough of me to help me to get to them?"

"The fault is not Colin Fraser's. I assure you, Miss Kirkwood, no one in the world could be more distressed than he at the thought of your suffering any annoyance."

But I was still crying.

"I thought it would be so nice to be independent, and I meant to work so hard in my situation; and now they don't even care enough about me to send word how I am to get there; and you, who are going near the very place, won't condescend to tell me the way to the farm!"

He got up and walked the whole length of the carriage twice in silence, then he sat down opposite to me and took my hand. I tried to draw it away, but I was powerless to evade that firm grasp. He looked full into my face with his dark blue eyes, and said gently,—

"Don't cry, and don't be angry with me. I am going to explain it to you; perhaps it would have been better had I done so at first, but I could not bring myself to do it. Miss Kirkwood, I am Colin Fraser!"

I stared. He evidently seemed to think the disclosure would explain all to me. It did nothing of the sort; I was more mystified than ever. If he were the father of my pupils, and my own employer, what could be simpler than for him to take me to his house!

"Then it will all be easy," I said, still perplexed. "Of course you are going home, and you will show me the way. Is Mrs. Fraser better, and do you think the children will be pleased to see me?"

He looked at me appealingly, almost as though begging me to understand and spare him some painful revelation; then, seeing my bewilderment, he went bravely on,—

"There has been some strange mistake. The moment I had Mrs. Van Raa's telegram I knew there had been an error, but it was impossible for me to set it right. I knew that if I rushed off to Cape Town that very instant you would have left it before I got there. All that was in my power was to come on by this train to Dodderton, and try to find you out and explain things as well as I could."

"You have found me out," I said, sharply; "so perhaps you will kindly explain."

"It is ever so much worse than I expected," said Colin Fraser, simply. "I thought governesses were always big bony women, who could take care of themselves."

"I can take care of myself."

"You—you look a baby—the kind of creature a man would like to shelter and protect from life's rough winds. I don't think I'm a coward, Miss Kirkwood, but I have hated my task ever since you told me your name."

"If you would only explain," I said, crossly.

"Well, then, I am Colin Fraser, and I have neither wife nor child."

Dead silence. If he had flung a bombshell at me and it had exploded I could not have felt more consternation.

I put one hand to my head, and tried to think. What did it all mean? I had come more than six thousand miles to teach this man's children, and lo! he had neither wife nor child. It seemed to me as if ruin and beggary stood before me. I possessed only the remains of the money given by Mrs. Warburton for my journey, and perhaps ten pounds of my own—not half enough combined to take me back to England, even if anything worth going to had awaited me there.

My meditations were interrupted by Colin Fraser. He put one hand on my shoulder, tenderly as a mother could have done, and said gently,—

"Try to tell me all about it."

"There is nothing to tell."

"There must be," he smiled. "Someone must have told you of my imaginary children, and their need of an instructress. Try and think how it all happened."

"Mrs. Warburton wanted a governess for her sister's children. She paid my passage, and I agreed to come."

"That is better," said Colin, frankly. "I

am relieved of an awful fear. I thought it might be some hoax, and you had really been deceived. Now I am sure it is only an innocent mistake, which can soon be set right. This Mrs. Warburton would never have sent you out and paid your passage if a genuine engagement had not awaited you."

"I am sure she would not have deceived me. She was very nice; her husband is a clergyman, they were both as kind to me as ever they could be."

"Come, I begin to feel quite hopeful. Now try and tell me exactly what address they gave you."

I repeated it like a parrot:—

"Mrs. FRASER,
Wednesday's River,
Red District."

"And did they give you no direction how to get to it?"

"Mrs. Warburton said I was to telegraph from Port Elizabeth to Mr. Fraser, and that he would most likely come as far as Grahamstown to meet me; but when I was staying with Mrs. Van Ran she said she knew Red District very well, and that Dodderton was much nearer than she telegraphed."

"And you are sure it was Colin Fraser's farm you wanted?"

"Mrs. Van Ran said Mr. Fraser's name was Colin. I remember the initial was C, but I don't think I ever heard the name until she mentioned it."

Colin Fraser was laughing till the tears ran down his cheeks. I sat in offended silence, much annoyed at his want of sympathy.

"I can't help it, Miss Kirkwood, I really can't; it's the strangest mistake I ever heard. Red District extends about fifty miles, and except the centre, where there is a small town called Red District, it is subdivided under various names. The northern part called Wednesday's River is about twelve miles out of Grahamstown; quite forty miles from there is the small town or settlement called from the district, and near that is my homestead, which in memory of an old friend I call 'Wednesday's River Farm.' Mrs. Van Ran jumped to the conclusion you wanted me, whereas you were seeking Charles Fraser of Primrose Farm, Wednesday's River Division, Red District. Now there is nothing in the world to worry over. All we have to do is to go on to Grahamstown instead of getting out at Dodderton."

"You can get out at Dodderton," I replied, sullenly.

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"I don't want to inflict my company on you."

"Don't you think you're rather unkind?"

"No."

"Look here, Miss Kirkwood. I live miles away from my nearest neighbour, and I haven't a lady friend; for miles there isn't even a decent hotel near. Don't you see what an awful fix I was in? Goodness knows if I'd had a mother or sister living with me I would have rejoiced heartily at the mistake which brought you to my farm instead of Fraser's, but as it was—"

I began to forgive him, for it dawned on me that the position had been awkward, so I let myself think.

"You have been very kind, and I'm sorry I was so unreasonable."

"You weren't. Your mistake was most natural under the circumstances."

"It has been a comedy of errors."

"All's well that ends well."

Long pause.

"And you'll let me take you to Fraser's?"

"Won't it be inconvenient?"

"Not a bit."

"Mr. Fraser."

"Well."

"Do you know them?"

"Very well indeed! I only wonder I didn't guess the real people you were seeking before; but you see you were so sure it was Colin Fraser I was misled."

"Are they nice?"

"I never tasted them."

"Do be serious!"

"It is a shame to tease you. Yes, Miss Kirkwood, I think my namasakes are 'nice' in every sense of the word. Mrs. Fraser is an English gentlewoman and her children are well brought up. They're not rich, but there's no stint."

"And do you think they will like me? I do so hate the idea of moving about. I should like to stay with them for years."

"I think Mrs. Fraser is sure to like you, but I doubt your staying with her for years."

"Why?"

"I would rather not tell you."

"Is the farm haunted?"

"Oh, dear, no!"

"Do you mean I shall not be clever enough?"

"No."

"Hem!"

"You must know the reason as well as I do. With your face you are not likely to be anyone's governess for years."

"You said just now I had a face like a baby."

"So you have."

"You will see I shall stay for years!" I retorted. "Perhaps by the time I leave you may really be wanting a governess."

"Perhaps!"

We reached Grahamstown in due time. Mr. Fraser collected my possessions, went off to some livery stables, and finally returned with a novel-looking vehicle called a spider, drawn by two stolid horses, and boasting a small coloured boy behind.

Before we started he insisted on my partaking of dinner. I am convinced the hotel people took us for bride and bridegroom, and that Mr. Fraser basely neglected to contradict the mistake.

"In three hours you will be safely at your journey's end," he said, gravely. "I wonder if you will ever give a thought to a poor, lonely bachelor, whose humble home you nearly honoured?"

"And who very much dreaded the said house."

He disregarded the remark, and repeated his former question.

"Shall you?"

"Perhaps."

"I wish you would let me ask you one question, Miss Kirkwood."

"It seems to me you ask plenty, without the telling."

"Well, will you answer it?"

His blue eyes were upon me. I could not help giving the promise he desired.

"Yes."

He took my slim fingers in his broad hand, and looking at me earnestly, said,—

"You told me a while ago you had neither friends nor near relations in England. Have you a lover?"

"Yes."

He dropped my hand with a jerk, and his face grew like a thunder-cloud. I felt bound to defend myself.

"You wouldn't like me to tell a falsehood, would you? And I have a lover."

No answer.

"Are you ready?" I half rose.

But he kept his seat.

"A pretty lover!" he growled at last; "to let you come to the other side of the world. He ought to have married you, if he had had to slave like a nigger to keep you."

"Thanks; but that effort wouldn't have been necessary. He had, as he took care to tell me, a red-brick house and a thousand a-year."

A strange light broke on the cross face opposite to mine.

"Do you mean you refused him?"

"I couldn't help it," I said, apologetically.

"You see he was turned seventy, and I had grown to look upon him as an uncle, since he had been paying his addresses to my three aunts for fifteen years."

"Was he a Mormon?"

"Oh, no!"

"But the three aunts."

"He was deliberating which would suit him best, then unluckily I came to stay with them, and he liked me."

Mr. Fraser was laughing heartily.

"No wonder your aunts let you come to Africa. Little girl, I think you treated them very badly."

"I didn't!"

"You robbed them of a lover."

"I didn't; I left him for them."

"And this is your only lover?"

I grew hot.

"I think that is a very mean question," I said, snappishly. "How many lovers would you expect me to have?"

But he did not answer, so perhaps he had not calculated.

"Turned seventy!" he repeated, with an air of triumph. "Well, I don't think he has much chance."

"He has none. I don't approve of matrimony."

"Why not?"

"I think most women marry for a home or for money, and it is horrid!"

"And how about love?"

No answer.

"Don't you believe in love?"

"Yes," I said, slowly, "but it is very rare, and we can't all expect to have it."

Mr. Fraser seemed to think the conversation had lasted long enough, for he paid the bill, handed me into the spider, took the reins, and drove off at a gallant pace for my employers.

CHAPTER III.

I don't suppose every girl suddenly transplanted to a distant colony, with different manners, customs, and habits to any she has yet known, would have been happy; but from the moment I saw Mrs. Fraser's face I knew Primrose Farm was going to be home to me, and before I had been there a month I was sure I had been right.

The Frasers were simple, kindly people, who, in spite of the hard work by which they had struggled to independence, had retained all the refined and cultivated tastes they brought with them a dozen years before.

Music, books, magazines and fancy-work were all to be found in Mrs. Fraser's drawing-room; and if she took a far more active share in household management than she would have done in England, she never for a moment lost the appearance of a gentlewoman.

It was a twelve-mile drive, over a wretched road into Grahamstown, and with six children under nine she could seldom attempt to leave home, so that she had a great lack of feminine companionship; and it was to supply this almost as much as for the children's education that she had sought an English governess, and from the moment of my arrival she treated me more as a sister than anything else.

Before I had been there a month she knew all about Mr. Appleby's proposal, and had laughed with me over the absurd mistake which had caused poor Colin Fraser so much embarrassment.

"To credit him, of all men, with a wife and children! Why, my dear, he will hardly speak to a lady; he is a confirmed woman-hater, and always has been."

"Not always," contradicted her husband. "He was engaged to an English beauty before ever he came out here; but when his uncle was idiot enough to marry and have a son to cut him off from the baronetcy, why, the heartless creature jilted him. He has never looked at a girl since."

"It's a pity," said Mrs. Fraser, thoughtfully. "He must have made a great deal of money."

"Plenty," agreed her husband; "what with ostriches and diamonds I should say he had made quite a fortune, but he'll never marry in Africa. When he's got as much

he thinks necessary he'll go home to enjoy it; there's not the making of a colonist in him."

He came over for Christmas, I remember, taking us all by surprise and stayed a week, making himself the most delightful slave to the children, and amusing us all by his meriment.

"You have come out in quite a new character!" said Mrs. Fraser to him one night, when he had been playing with her little girls. "Don't you find it lonely at home sometimes?"

"Very," was the unexpected reply. "I have often wondered," she said, quietly, "why you don't marry and settle down."

"I fully intend to some day."

"Then you have got over your dislike to women?"

"I shall not marry a woman."

Mrs. Fraser laughed.

"I don't see how you can do otherwise if you marry at all."

"Oh! I might marry a child or a baby. I have a great affection for babies—I have, really!"

Mrs. Fraser looked bewildered; I think she fancied him a little mad. I kept my eyes fixed on the ground, and was angry with myself for blushing in spite of my efforts.

The next day Mr. Colin Fraser took leave of us. My employers were both going into Grahamstown, and I was to remain at home in command of the children. Imagine my surprise when, half-an-hour after Mr. and Mrs. Fraser had started, our late guest returned by the opposite road.

"The horses seemed tired," he said, in explanation, "and I knew I should be welcome another day, Miss Kirkwood."

"If we had only known! A letter came for you, and we sent it away."

"I met the boy and got it; but for that letter I am not very sure I should have come back."

The twins were gardening, the lesser children taking afternoon naps. Colin Fraser and I were alone, and I began to wish we were not, without in the least knowing why.

"You have been here nearly three months."

"Yes."

"And you like it?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if you have forgotten our journey. I often think of it."

So did I, but I was not going to admit as much, so I said gravely,—

"Isn't it a pity Mr. and Mrs. Fraser started for Grahamstown! They would have put off going if they had known you were coming back."

"Janet," said Colin, looking at me keenly with his big blue eyes, "you know perfectly well I didn't come back to see them."

I blushed again.

"I think you know everything I want to tell you," he said, with another of those keen glances.

"I'm sure I don't."

"Do you ever hear from Seventy?"

"From whom?"

"Your lover?"

"Oh, dear, no; he is most likely my uncle by this time."

"And are you sorry?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Do you still cherish a distaste for matrimony?"

"No answer."

"Do you still believe in love?"

"I don't know—for some people."

"I believe in it for some people, too. Janet, don't you think you could learn to love me!"

"Why?"

"Because I have loved you ever since I saw you, and you know it's very mean of you to steal my heart unless you give me yours in return."

"I didn't steal it."

"Anyway, it is yours."

A long silence.

"You said you would never marry a woman."

I heard you tell Mrs. Fraser so."

"And I assure you, as I have done before, you are nothing in the world but a big, overgrown baby."

"I wonder you want such a creature."

"But I do want you. Janet, will you come?"

Mr. and Mrs. Fraser were delighted, amazed, and perplexed in a breath. We were certainly engaged, as they found out before they were well in the drawing-room, since Colin announced the fact with a haste and pride I thought quite uncalled for; but why we couldn't have made up our minds before, why Colin should ride twenty miles away from me, and then turn back and ride another twenty to get back to me, puzzled them not a little.

He made it all clear to me the very next day; he had meant to marry me from the moment he saw me (he took my consent for granted in a most provoking manner, I assured him), but he would not propose until he could see his way clear to returning to England. The letter we had sent after him (he did not say even then say what was in it) had brought news which changed all his plans—and so he came back.

"Confess you were glad to see me?"

"I won't!"

"Don't you care a little, Janet?"

There was a sadness in his voice that touched me. I put my hand into his, and whispered,—

"I cared so much that I had begun to count the weeks till Easter. You know Mrs. Fraser asked you to come again then."

"I think you love me a little, Janet?"

"I'm afraid I do—but I never meant to."

"You would miss me if I went away to England?"

I crept closer to him, and shivered at the bare idea. He stooped and kissed me.

"I shall never go without you, sweetheart!"

"And you will come here at Easter?"

"I think not."

"Oh!"

"I don't think either you or I shall be here at Easter, Janet."

"But why?"

"I have spoken to Mrs. Fraser, and she has written home to ask her sister to send her another governess, not a baby this time, but a middle-aged individual who can be warranted not to steal other people's hearts. Mrs. Fraser has promised me you need not stay until this paragon arrives, and so—"

He paused a little, and then he told me he hated long engagements. Why shouldn't we be married five weeks hence—on St. Valentine's Day?

"Colin!"

"What is it, baby?"

"Someone said you loved someone else long ago—are you sure?"

"Sure that I have forgotten her?" he asked lightly. "No, baby, I am not, but I am certain of another thing—that a little girl near me is dearer to me far than Mrs. Mortimer ever was or ever could be."

"You are quite sure?"

"Positive."

He had to go back to his farm to make some arrangements, but before he left I had promised that he should have his way, and I would be married on the fourteenth of February.

"It is dreadfully soon!"

"It is ages!" contradicted Colin, "but as I have really a great deal to do I won't insist on an earlier day."

When he had gone I found out two things—that he had insisted on refunding the money the Frasers had paid for my passage, and that though he had given my friend a most liberal sum to provide for my wedding, he made the peculiar proviso that I should not buy a single article of attire, and should be married in a white dress I often wore in the summer evenings when we had been together.

Mrs. Fraser was not a little bewildered. She entertained a belief that even in Cape

Town there were no shops comparable to those of Grahamstown. I think, too, she had enjoyed the idea of helping to choose pretty things, and was disappointed.

"I don't mind a bit," I replied, magnanimously, "but I wish he would not spend so much on the wedding. I don't like it."

Before Colin came back the news was brought us that his farm had been sold most advantageously, and he was going to leave Red District.

"He must be thinking of settling in Kimberley," said Mrs. Fraser. "I know he had something to do with diamond mines. I am so sorry! Janet, do you know I had been looking forward to paying you a visit."

"So you must wherever we are," I protested, and when Colin returned I asked him to give the invitation.

He gave it willingly, but with an addition.

"Only, Mrs. Fraser, it must be an English home—not an African—that my wife welcomes you. We sail for Southampton three days after our wedding."

"Colin!" I exclaimed as soon as I got him alone. "What can you mean?"

"Only that I have a fancy for England, sweetheart; and the farm sold so well there is no reason my Baby should not have a honeymoon on the Continent if she wants it after we get to Europe."

"I don't want it, and I never meant to be such an awful expense to you."

"I know," and his eye twinkled. "If I told you we were about ruined, Baby, and I should have to take you to a six-roomed house and a little maid-of-all-work I fancy you would contrive to survive it."

"I am sure I should!"

"And not envy your aunts Mr. Seventy?"

"Colin," I said, with a smothered sob, "you know I should not. I want no one but you!"

Well, we were married, and though I wore the white dress which had been washed a dozen times, and had no bridesmaids but my little pupils, everyone said it was a very pretty wedding.

"Baby," said my husband when we had left the steamer and were in the London train, "Don't you wonder where I am taking you?"

"It is all so strange. I believe I forgot to ask."

"I have a very old friend in Bedford-place, and I promised him we would stay there a day or two. You are sure to like Grant; he is kindness itself!"

"Is he a lawyer? Is his name Alexander?"

"Yes, to both questions."

"Then he was my guardian, and the best friend I ever had."

"How very odd!"

I think Mr. Grant's eyes had never opened so wide before as when he saw me on Colin's arm. The kind old man seemed as if he could not believe his senses.

"Why it's Janet Kirkwood!"

"No," corrected my husband, with a smile. "Lady Fraser, if you please, sir."

It was quite true. The letter Colin had received the summer day he left Primrose Farm was from Mr. Grant, telling of the death of his cousin, the schoolboy baronet. From that moment Colin had known of his prosperity, but he wanted to surprise me with it.

And surprised I was. Lady Fraser, wife of a baronet, with twenty thousand a-year, a country estate, and a town house, it seemed too wonderful to be true!

"You must write to the old ladies," said Mr. Grant, lightly, "and tell them you've been a credit to the family at last."

"I shall not."

"They'll find it out in time," said my husband, "and if they don't, Janet and I are enough for each other."

I was actually presented at Court by no less a person than the fair young Countess of Tremaine; and when, at her request, Colin and I spent a week that autumn at the Park, the truth burst upon my aunts that their little objectionable niece was Lady Fraser of Fraser

Castle, with an income too and a name older than Lord Tremaine's own.

Mr. Appleby had left the neighbourhood. They were the three Miss Kirkwoods still, and likely to remain so; but they held out the olive branch, and Colin induced me to accept it.

"I owe them a debt, sweetheart, if you do not. For my sake, be friends."

"But Colin, how can you owe them anything?"

He laughed. "Didn't they drive you out into the world, and cause you to become a governess?"

"Well, in a measure, I suppose they did."

"Well, then, I owe my wife to them, since I should not have seen you but for that strange mistake about JANET'S SITUATION."

[THE END.]

FROU-FROU.

—O—

WHEN Robert Moore walked into the drawing-room of Mr. Duncan's house a pretty petite figure, clad in blue velvet, emerged from one corner of the sofa. Simultaneously a dumpy bundle of long curly white hair, the pet poodle of pretty Beatrix Aldrich, and our hero's particular aversion, flew at him with a salute of short, snapping barks.

"Frou-Frou!" cried Miss Trix, reproachfully. "Come here, you naughty doggy! Don't mind her, Robert. She won't bite."

Nevertheless, Frou-Frou had caught hold of the leg of Robert's trousers, and was worrying her sharp little teeth through the cloth. Robert shook her off with a smothered exclamation of disgust. He hated poodles, and this one in particular.

Frou-Frou, being flung off with considerable force, fell against the piano-leg, and forthwith set up a howl.

"I wish you wouldn't be so rough with her, Robert," said Trix, gathering up her pet and cuddling it fondly. "Poor little Frou-Frou! It was an abused doggy, so it was, and Trix won't let them knock it around so."

"I don't see why you always keep that little beast around you, Trix," said Robert, savagely.

"I keep it because I want to."

"If it were only good for something besides snapping at one's heels I wouldn't mind. But it is such a stupid, ugly little brute!"

"Ugly?" echoed Trix, indignantly. "I don't see how you can say that! Frou-Frou is a very pretty dog. Everybody says so. But you never did like her, Robert. I suppose it is not to be expected that you would, when Captain Ellis gave her to me."

This last was said with a vindictive little fling, that brought the colour flaming into Robert Moore's face.

"You know what I think about your accepting presents from gentlemen, Beatrix," he said, shortly. "But, never since we have been engaged," this with angry emphasis, "have you shown the slightest regard for what I think or say in such matters."

"Well," said Trix, with a rebellious pout, "you are always asking such absurd things. You know I wouldn't give up Frou-Frou for anyone—not for anybody in the world!"

"Did I ever ask you to give up Frou-Frou?"

"Well, you've been awfully disagreeable about the poor, dear darling."

"I shall be very careful what I say hereafter."

The tone in which he spoke made Miss Trix look up quickly, and her sunny blue eyes clouded.

"Don't look at me in that way, Robert," she cried. "You know I don't like you to look like that."

"Do you think you really know what you do want, Beatrix?" he said, impatiently, as he walked up and down the room.

"Don't call me Beatrix!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears. "I hate to be called Beatrix, and you—you've called me that twice."

Robert looked out of the window, then at the little sobbing figure on the sofa. She was hardly more than a child, and never, he sometimes thought, would be anything else; yet how this great, strong man did love her! He could not bear to see her cry. It was folly to quarrel with her, anyhow. A wave of tenderness swept over Robert's heart, and, obeying its warm impulse, he took Miss Trix in his arms.

"Don't cry, darling!" he said, brushing the golden curls away from the flushed tear-wet face. "Dry your eyes. There! you're making them all red, and I have come to take you down to the flower-show. Run along and get your hat on."

It took about fifteen minutes of alternate kissing, petting, and cajolery, to drive away the clouds from Trix's face. But she tripped away smiling at last, with Frou-Frou following her. At the end of ten minutes more, she came back in a jaunty blue velvet jacket and Tam O'Shanter cap, carrying a pretty feather muff and Miss Frou-Frou.

Robert's face clouded instantly.

"Trix," he said, "you are not going to take that—that dog with you?"

"Why, of course! I always take Frou-Frou."

"Not when I am with you!"

"Why, Robert!" she exclaimed in a pained tone. "I thought you said you were going to be good to me."

"I am, if you will let me. But I object most distinctly to that poodle. I am not going along the street with you, if you carry Frou-Frou. If there is anything I detest, it is to see a woman going along with a dog under her arm."

"Very well," said Trix, sitting down, with a stubborn look on her baby face. "You can go alone, then. Frou-Frou and I must go together, if we go at all—mustn't we, Frou-Frou?"

"Am I to understand, then," said Robert, "that you refuse to leave the dog behind?"

"Yes."

"Then I must bid you good-morning," he said, curtly; and, before Trix was aware of it, he had stalked out of the room, banged the front-door, and was gone.

Trix sat still for a moment or two, actually dumbfounded; then she broke out in a savage soliloquy:

"The idea! I suppose he thinks I am going to give way to him in everything. If I began that way I couldn't call my soul my own when we were married. Catch me letting any man domineer over me so! No, Mr. Robert! you can't do that. I have as much right to my way as you have to yours, and I'm going to have it."

With this rebellious speech, Miss Trix flounced upstairs and took off her things. The next day, a messenger was despatched to the office of Mr. Robert Moore, with the following communication:

"MR. ROBERT MOORE:

"I am satisfied that we have made a mistake. We could never be happy together, and it is better for us to separate than to risk a life of infelicity. (Trix thought this sounded very well.) I return to you your ring, begging you will consider our engagement at an end. When you receive this I shall have left Mr. Duncan's. I am going to travel, so that we may perhaps never meet again. Good bye. I shall never marry; but I wish you much happiness."

"BEATRIX BLANCHE ALDRICH."

When Robert got this note, he sprang into a cab and dashed off to Mr. Duncan's. Miss Dolly Duncan received him rather haughtily. She was evidently in Trix's confidence, and aided with her.

"Miss Aldrich has gone to London," she

said, coldly. "I cannot give you her address."

Robert bit his lip. Trix was in earnest, then? He went home, packed his valise, and took the next train for London. As he sat in the smoking-carriage, vainly trying to puff away his discomfiture, he said,—

"If I can only see her I am sure I can bring her to reason. But how shall I find her?"

There had been a time when Robert had dreamed of the woman who was to be his wife—a splendid regal creature, at whose feet he was willing to prostrate himself, in adoration of her rare intellectuality and strong womanhood. Why should he care, if Trix Aldrich had thrown him over for a woolly white poodle? What a fool he had been to give her the chance! And yet there was something about her, childish as she often seemed, that had, for him, an inexpressible charm. After all, she was for him the one woman in the whole world. Hence, he was thundering along on his way to London, pursued by a cruel fear that he would not find her, and thinking that if he only had that wilful golden head resting on his shoulder again he could somehow bring her to reason.

The next morning he woke up in his room at the hotel, and made up his mind that he would inspect all the West-end hotels, to see where Trix had gone. He did this; but he could not find her. At last, coming out one day, he was moodily thinking he might as well go home, when an incident occurred which at once changed all his plans.

The street was thronged with vehicles, and Robert was standing on the curb, waiting for a chance to cross, when suddenly, from among the crowd on the pavement, out darted a fluffy white poodle, with a blue ribbon in its collar. The dog was evidently lost; for it ran helplessly first one way and then the other; and finally, in a fit of bewilderment, dashed right in among the passing carriages.

Poor little dog—it was frightened to death; and surely the wheels would have crushed it utterly had not Robert rushed forward, with a sudden feeling of pity, caught up the poor dog, and passed with it to the other side. There he stood, looking around for the owner of the poodle. But no one was forthcoming. Meantime, he saw that the dog had not wholly escaped—there was blood on its white coat. Evidently it was hurt internally.

"I think it's lost," said a big policeman, who came up and began at once to speculate about a possible reward. "Better take it home with you."

Robert looked ruefully at the soft little bundle of wool, which was spattered all over with mud, with here and there a stain of blood. One would have thought that he would have turned the poodle over to the policeman's care. But our hero was one who could never resist the sight of suffering, even in a brute; and the dumb pitiful appeal in the dog's eyes moved him beyond belief.

"Poor little dog," he said, "I'm afraid it's badly hurt."

"Better take it home, sir, and send for a doctor," repeated the policeman. "It may pull through yet."

"It looks to me," answered Robert, "as if it were hurt internally—and fatally."

Before the policeman could reply a sudden shriek was heard, and a delicate girlish figure came rushing along the pavement. On hearing the shriek, the poodle looked up as if it recognized familiar tones; its dim eyes brightened when it saw who uttered them; it struggled faintly, as if to escape from Robert's arms.

"Oh, my poor darling!" cried the newcomer. "What has happened? Are you hurt? Why did you run away? Please, sir, give her to—"

Up to this moment, in her excitement, the speaker had seen only the dog. She now recognized Robert. She stopped, flushing painfully.

"I rescued her from under a carriage—"

wheel, dear," said her lover: for it was Trix who had rushed up; "but alas! too late, I fear. I am so sorry." As he spoke, he put the dog tenderly in the girl's arms.

"Oh! oh!" cried Trix, "my poor Fron-Fron! I had gone into a shop, you see," she said, turning to Robert, as if half apologetically, "leaving her in the carriage. She sprang out, ran away, and got lost; and now, now—"

She burst into tears. The dog saw it, and looked up at her with infinite sympathy in its eyes, as if it knew and would gladly share her trouble. Robert was inexpressibly softened.

"Let me take you and Fron-Fron to your carriage," he said, kindly. "Let me see you home. Perhaps Fron-Fron is not so much hurt, after all."

Could the dog understand? Whether it could or not, it looked from one to the other with a look that seemed to say it knew better; then, sinking back, with a moan, into the arms of its mistress, it lay there motionless. It did not stir, even when they reached the carriage; but, before they had gone many streets, it suddenly gave a shiver, opened its eyes, looked up at his mistress pitifully, sighed, and sank back. Poor Fron-Fron was dead.

Over her grave the lovers forgot their estrangement. If she had separated them while living, in death she reunited them. Trix, weeping on Robert's shoulder, forgot her anger at him; Robert, soothing her, forgot her pettishness and injustice. She yielded to his kisses, no longer now rejecting them; she smiled thankfully when he replaced the betrothal-ring on her finger. She murmured: "Oh, how kind you were to poor Fron-Fron. How shall I ever repay you?"

Trix, after that, never had another favourite. She has long been married, and is the happiest of wives and mothers. With her children's arms about her neck, and their kisses on her cheeks, and the love of her husband, she has nothing more, she says, to ask for in this world. You would hardly know her for the wilful childish Trix of the old days.

E. L.

FACETIE.

"LEND me a tennah, Jinks." "What law?" "Why, to spend, of cawse." "Haw, I think not. I can spend it just as well myself." "Lend it to me to keep, then." "If I lent it to you it would be to keep, deah boy. Awak me an easiaw one."

SWELL No. 1 (pretending to mistake for another rival whom he sees standing in evening dress at the cloak-room door of the theatre): "Ah! have you a programme?" Swell No. 2 (equal to the occasion): "Thanks, my man, get one from the other fellow."

RICH WIDOW: "I can't keep a servant girl in the house. I have sent away six or seven already. They all fall in love with my handsome coachman." Gentleman friend: "Then why don't you send the coachman away?" (A painful but significant silence ensues.)

A RARE SPECTACLE.—"That must have been a grand and beautiful sight at Niagara Falls!" he exclaimed, as he looked up from his paper. "Another ice bridge? Yes, I should like to have seen it. How far did it extend?" "I didn't refer to an ice bridge of any sort, sir, but to a hackman having been found frozen to death in Prospect Park!"—*American Paper.*

FIRST GIRL: "Let's go and have some lunch, Estelle?" SECOND GIRL: "I'd like to, dear; but have we time?" FIRST GIRL: "We have twenty minutes. How long would it take you to get what you want?" SECOND GIRL: "Oh, about fifteen minutes." FIRST GIRL: "Well, it would take me fifteen minutes, too; twice fifteen is thirty. We haven't time, dear, after all."

"THAT man has the greatest voice of anybody on the floor," said a visitor in the House gallery, as a member sat down after the speech. "Just like a bass drum," replied his companion visitor. "Yes, strong and sonorous." "Yes, and nothing inside of it."

CHIPPER: "I, say haven't you grown tall since you got that coat? Seems to me it's pretty short, isn't it?" SNIPPER: "No; I had it so on purpose." "What for?" "So that when anyone made an insulting remark about its looks I could kick him without bursting off the bottom button."

EDWIN (before the serpents' cage at the Zoo): "See, Angelina, that large snake is a boa-constrictor; and down in South America where he lives he lies in wait for a victim, and, winding himself about the poor person, slowly hugs him to death." Angelina (with a shudder): "Oh, how nice!"

BLACKSMITH (to young man): "You think you possess the necessary qualifications for a blacksmith?" Young Man: "Yes, sir; I was a member of the football team at college." Blacksmith (dubiously): "You may be strong enough, young man, but this business demands brains as well as strength."

"I WANT a Bible," said a tall, gaunt woman, stepping into a book shop. "Do you wish the revised edition?" inquired the clerk, civilly. "I ain't pertikuler. I jes' want one in the house so I'll have a safe place to keep my specs in. A family Bible that won't never be meddled with is the kind I want." She got it.

PITON, a soldier, returned from the seat of war in Tonquin and stumped on a wooden leg about the streets of Paris. One day he met the enthusiastic Pierre. "Brave warrior," said Pierre, "thanks to you, France has now one foot in the remote East." "Right you are," replied Piton; "twas I who left it there!"

"Oh dear," said a Gravesend girl to a South-end girl the other night, clapping her hands, "have you been tobogganning?" "No, not yet." "How unfortunate you are! Do you know, it's just delightful." "Yes?" "Yes; and when you're going down hill it seems just as if you were actually dying. Oh, it's too delightful for anything!"

MRS. PRIMA DONNA: "I will have to ask you to change that bill, sir." Hotelkeeper: "Beg pardon; I made it out myself, and am sure it is correct." "Instead of owing you fifty pounds, you owe me two thousand pounds." "Eh! Wha—wha—how do you make that out?" "While in my room dressing this morning I forgot myself, and sang an aria all the way through."

AT THE HOSPITAL.—Physician: "I congratulate you sincerely, my dear sir." Patient (joyfully): "Then I will recover?" Physician: "No; not exactly; but after consultation we have come to the conclusion that your case is an entirely new one, and we have decided to give your name to the malady, provided that our diagnosis is confirmed by the autopsy." (Patient immediately expires from fright.)

YOUNG LADY AT HOTEL, TO CALLER: "Ah, Mr. De Doode. You have left our hotel, I believe?" Mr. De Doode: "Ya-as, don't you know." "So sorry. What ever could have possessed you?" "Ah, Miss Fwances, it was the beastly napkins, don't you know. The waitah brought them in dwamp, don't you know, and they gave me a twifc cold in the head. A man can't stand everything, Miss Fwances."

A HIGHLAND CHIEF being on his deathbed was exhorted to forgive his enemies. He called his eldest son to his bedside, and thus spoke his last: "Donald, you see what a pass I have come to, and I am told that I must forgive my enemies, and especially the McTavish; and, for my soul's sake, I do forgive him accordingly. But, Donald, my dear son, if ever ye forgie the Tavish, or any o' his infernal name, may ma curse rest on ye for ever and ever. Amen!"

"Aw, De Sappy, what's ailing you this mawnin'?" "I've weecived bad news, Fitzperry, ole fel." "Tell me about it." "Yes-tahday I purchased a dozen high colliers, doncher know?" "Well?" "Well, to day I learn that the Prince of Wales has begun to wear turn-downs. It's dweadful."

A GENTLEMAN in Paris called upon a lady who had a mania for dogs. Ten or twelve puppies greeted him as he entered. He repulsed them kindly, when the lady exclaimed: "It is very easy to see that you do not love dogs." "Not love dogs!" said the visitor; "I'm sure I do. I ate ten of them during the siege!"

JINKS: "What's the matter, Blinks? You look unwell. Blinks: "Caught my death of cold to-day—shivered all the way down to the office." Jinks: "Weren't you dressed as warm as usual?" Blinks: "Yes, but just as I was leaving the house that infernal fool of a Blinks-on told me what the thermometer was."

A SOLON'S TERRIBLE THREAT.—"Farewell, father; I can stand your reproaches no longer. I will seek some foreign clime—Germany most likely; and once there I shall search for a wife among the nobility, and then—" "Oh, my dear son, anything but that! Have some consideration for your mother and sister, if you have none for me. I forgive you. Come, come to my arms!"

MRS. HEXAMERS: "We are to give a little musical entertainment next week. Mr. Featherly, and we should be glad to have you take part. You know something about music, don't you?" Featherly (proud of his musical talent): "Oh yes, I shall be delighted, Mrs. Hendricks, I assure you. What part will you want me to take?" "We would like to have you turn the leaves of the music at the piano."

A GOOD story is told of an old lady from the country who took a seat in the lift of one of our leading stores the other day, and placidly kept her seat while the lift plied from ground floor to top story indefinitely. At length the lift man inquired if she intended to get out anywhere in particular. "Yes," replied the dear old soul, "you may let me out at Temple Place."

PATIENT: "Tell me candidly, doctor, do you think I'll pull through?" Doctor: "Oh you are bound to get well; you can't help yourself. The Medical Record shows that out of one hundred cases like yours one per cent. recovers invariably." "That's a cheerful prospect." "What more do you want? I've treated ninety-nine cases, and every one of them died. Why, man alive, you can't die if you try. There's no humbug about statistics."

A NEGRO in Alabama was brought up for stealing a pair of chickens, but declared, solemnly, that he "didn't steal dem ar fowls," declaring, on the other hand, that the complainant had beaten him brutally with a club. "But," said the judge, "you're twice as large and strong as he; why didn't you defend yourself?" "Why, judge, see hyar; I had a chicken in each hand, an' what's two raw chickens agin' a club?"

A DELECTABLE COMPOUND.—When Dr. Kirkland was President of a well-known college, a famous hostelry in Cambridge was a great resort. One of the chief attractions of the Doctor's was the "flip," a delectable compound of a decidedly spirituous flavour. One day the President went up to the hostelry and asked to see the landlord. "Mr. —" said the Doctor, "I understand my young men come up here and drink your flip?" "Yes, sir," replied the tavern-keeper, in a voice which told how he deprecated the admonition, "they do." "Let me have some of that flip," said the dignified don. Whereupon a mug of the beverage was brought out, and was tasted by him. Then, fixing a stern glance upon the innkeeper, who almost trembled under it, the president said, "And my young men come out here and drink this stuff do they?" "Yes, sir," meekly replied the tavern-keeper. "Well," said the doctor, draining the mug, "I should think they would."

SOCIETY.

THE PRINCESS OF WALES recently paid a private visit to the Brompton Hospital for Consumption, and, together with the Princesses Louise, Victoria, and Maud, graciously took part in a concert to the patients and nurses, in which their Royal Highnesses were supported by the Hon. Mrs. North Dalrymple, Miss Don, Miss Knollys, Miss Mary Liddell, and Col. the Hon. Oliver Montagu.

An attractive and varied programme was carried out, the playing of the Princess of Wales and of the young Princesses evidently affording great delight to the invalids, who were most hearty in their applause. The Princess of Wales graciously accepted a bouquet, presented on behalf of the patients, by a little girl, one of their number.

After the concert her Royal Highness ascended by the lift to the Alexandra Gallery, and having brought with her a quantity of flowers, distributed them to the patients, a task in which she was assisted by the young Princesses.

THE PRINCESS MARY ADELAIDE opened the new day-nursery or crèche and mission buildings which have recently been erected in East-street, Baker-street, in connection with Portman Chapel. Her Royal Highness, who was accompanied by Lady Cairns and Lady Leila Sherbrooke, was conducted through the new buildings, which contain accommodation for a considerable number of infants, for the care of each of which, including food, 3d. per day will be charged.

THE "beauty" of the imperial party at Berlin last week was (says the *World*) the Princess Mathilde of Saxony, the eldest daughter of Prince George of Saxony, the younger brother of the King, and heir to the throne. The Princess, who attained her twenty-fourth year a few days ago, is not only beautiful, but also clever and extremely accomplished. She is known to have refused at least two very desirable offers. There has latterly been some talk of her marrying the Prince William of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, the eldest son of Prince Leopold, who is really the head of the family who reigns in Prussia, and one of the richest royal personages in Europe.

LADY JOHN MANNERS writes as follows:—The Empress of Germany gives a golden cross to every servant in the Empire who has remained over forty years in her present situation, and whose character is high. The editor of the *Quiver* magazine in January established an order of honourable service for domestic servants. Bibles and medals of different values have been given to servants according to their length of service. I have just received a gracious message from the Empress, expressing her warm interest in this encouragement to servants, and her pleasure in hearing that over one thousand three hundred have been already enrolled in the order. A surprisingly large number have remained over fifty years in their present posts.

THE marriage of Major Ian Hamilton, aide-de-camp to H.E. the Commander-in-Chief in India, with Jean, eldest daughter of Mr. John Muir, of Deanston, Perthshire, which was celebrated in the Cathedral, Calcutta, on Feb. 22, was one of the prettiest events of a gay season. The bridegroom, who had but lately returned from the Burma campaign, was attended by Col. Pole Carew, Coldstream Guards, as best man.

The bride, who was given away by her father, arrived at the cathedral (which was beautifully decorated for the occasion) at a quarter to five. She was attended by her five bridesmaids, who wore dresses of white Valenciennes lace, with moire sashes and tulle veils, fastened with pansy wreaths, and carried bouquets of pansies. Each wore a gold bangle with a pearl swallow, the gift of the bridegroom.

STATISTICS.

THE population of the United States in 1799 was 3,929,827; in 1810, 7,239,814; in 1850, 23,191,876; and in 1870, 38,555,983.

THE art of killing is becoming expensive. In 1856 in France the cost of the best cannon was £112, and the cost of a single discharge was about 12s. Now the most expensive siege guns cost £19,500, and one discharge costs £187.

GERMANY is the least illiterate country in Europe. For example, of persons above fifteen years of age in Germany 94 per cent. can read, while in Great Britain the percentage is 91, in Austria and France each 88, in Italy 74, in Spain 50, and in Russia 53.

In the United States there are 2,269 breweries, which produce annually 460,832,400 gallons, or over seven gallons per head. In Germany there are 23,940 breweries, which now produce annually 900,000,000 gallons, or over twenty gallons per head. In Great Britain there are 26,214 breweries, which produce annually 1,050,000,000 gallons, or over thirty gallons per head.

GEMS.

ALMOST every one has a predominant inclination, to which his other desires and affections submit, and which governs him, though, perhaps, with some intervals, through the whole course of his life.

If we use common words on a great occasion they are the more striking, because they are felt at once to have a particular meaning, like old banners, or every-day clothes hung up in a sacred place.

Of all vanities and fopperies, the vanity of high birth is the greatest. True nobility is derived from virtue, not from birth. Titles, indeed, may be purchased, but virtue is the only coin that makes the bargain valid.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SCOTCH SHORTBREAD.—Three-quarters of a pound of flour, half a pound of butter, six ounces of sugar. Mix well, roll out on a pastry-board. Lay kitchen-paper folded in four on a baking-sheet, do not butter it. Place the mixture on, when rolled to a quarter-inch thickness, and cut into a large round or oval; mark the edges with a knife or silver spoon, lay on pieces of lemon-peel and blanched almonds or coloured comfits, and bake in a slack oven till of a pale brown.

HOT TEA-CAKE.—One pound of flour, six ounces of sugar, six ounces of butter, two eggs, three-quarters of a pound of currants, one pint of milk, and two tablespoonfuls of yeast. Mix the flour and sugar, warm the milk, add the butter, stir in the yeast; add the eggs, put it to the flour and sugar, and let it rise well before the fire; then add the fruit, divide, and place in tin hoops. This will make ten or twelve buns; bake, split, and butter.

COLD FRUIT PUDDING.—Put a layer of any fruit—previously stewed with sugar, and allowed to get cold—or jam into a deep glass dish, mix three tablespoonfuls of cornflour with a gill of milk, boil one pint of milk with the thin rind of a lemon, and with sugar to taste. When well flavoured with the lemon, pour the boiling milk through a strainer on to the cornflour, stir, and return it to a saucepan. Boil five minutes, or until it thickens; and when cool enough not to break the glass, pour on the fruit, and leave it to get quite cold and set. Ornament, according to fancy, with jam, preserved fruit, or angelica.

MISCELLANEOUS.

HOUSE-BOATS are now being introduced on the Rhine after the English fashion, though on a larger scale. A regular floating dwelling-house will shortly be anchored in the port of Mannheim, and smaller house boats of the same kind are already much appreciated along the banks of the river.

WHALING SHIPS IN THE ARCTIC.—In the autumn, just before it gets cold, the ice forms, the ships huddle together, and each puts down two anchors, one at the bow and one at the stern, and these hold them from striking against the shore or one another until the ice forms around them and freezes them in solidly. Then the anchors and rudders are taken up, and, with lumber which they have brought from home, the whalers build a substantial house over the ship. They then get the Eskimo to build a sort of snow house over the wooden house, and so, with all this covering to protect them, they manage to keep warm and comfortable with very little fire, however cold it may be out of doors. Sometimes they put in double windows, the inside ones of glass, as usual, and the outside ones being made of slabs of ice, like the curious windows of the *igloos*. The white men do not live in these temporary houses built on top of the ships, but in the cabin and fore-castle, just as if they were cruising out to sea. The house is simply put over the ship to keep the rear places warm, and right well does its work. This "house," however, is very useful as a place for taking exercise, for ship carpentering work, and for any small jobs that may be necessary. The Eskimo also congregate there, especially about meal time, when generous whalers treat them with sea bread and weak tea sweetened with treacle.

WEDDINGS IN JAPAN.—Some authors maintain that marriage in Japan is only a civil contract, unaccompanied by any religious solemnization. Others say that there is a religious ceremony, and that the marriage must be registered in the temple to which the young people belong. Prayers and benedictions are there pronounced by the priest, and there is a formal kindling of bridal torches, the bride's from the altar, and the bridegroom's from the bride's; after this they are proclaimed to be man and wife. Now begins the business of the day. The bride with her black teeth is dressed in white, and when she leaves her father's house she is covered from head to foot in the garment which is to be her shroud. In this plight she is seated in a palanquin, and carried forth to parade the greater part of the town, escorted by her family and friends. When she reaches her husband's house two of her youthful friends accompany her to the state-room. These friends answer to our bridesmaids, and are called the male and female butterflies. In this state-room sits the bridegroom in the seat of honour, with his parents and nearest relations, and there are two tables in the apartment very elaborately arranged. On one of them is a miniature representation of a fir tree, emblematic of man's strength; of a plum tree in blossom, the emblem of a woman's beauty; and of cranes and tortoises, the emblems of long life and happiness. On the other table stands all the apparatus for drinking saki, the national stimulant. By this time the bride in her shroud and the attendant butterflies take their places; and then commences the pouring out, presenting and drinking of saki amidst formalities numerous and minute beyond description. When the drinking is at last over the wedding guests make their appearance, and the evening is spent in eating and drinking. In deference to the frugality of the early Japanese, the wedding feast consists of very simple fare. Three days after this the bride and bridegroom pay a visit to the lady's family. The bride then plucks out her eyebrows, and the wedding ceremonies are finally over.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

L. L.—We know nothing of the domestic affairs of the actor named.

C. H. J.—No knowledge of its use in the way stated.

H. E.—We suggest reading Ritter's "History of Music, in the Form of Lectures."

L. M.—Chopin is pronounced "sho-pan"; Beethoven, "ba-to-ven"; Liszt, "List"; and Bach, "bak."

A. D.—The words quoted signify restriction as to number, &c.

E. S.—Employed to aid printers in making up the forms of books.

D. W.—A treatise on electric lighting will fully explain the terms to which you refer, and will be found very interesting.

F. N.—No recipe that we could recommend as harmless. An experienced physician might be able to suggest a remedy.

JESSE.—The poem was not written by Mr. Dickens but by Mr. G. R. Sims, and a most realistic and artistic production it is.

W. T.—Your writing is not as neat as might be but quite legible. The larger signature is the better. One ink of incised hair is not brown, the other chestnut.

L. D.—The play of "Theresa, or the Ophan of Geneva," was written by John Howard Payne. It was first produced in London in 1816, with Edmund Kean in the principal part.

W. S.—As you have tried the only remedy we could suggest we cannot aid you, save to recommend you to keep regular hours and take all the exercise possible in the open air.

K. R. P.—We regret we are unable to inform you. Many local charities do unquestionably exist. You could find out by writing to the mayor or clerk to the Board of Guardians.

C. F.—There is no premium on your coin. If a man becomes a manufacturer of a special article known by his name, no other man can imitate the label or method of packing simply because he has a similar name.

M. S.—We don't think we would accept the coat and dress from the young man, unless he is your affianced husband and you are in real need of the articles. You are a demit brunette. You write a good business hand.

E. F. D.—The bronze statue of Lafayette, erected in Union Square, opposite Broadway, New York, in 1876, by French residents, was modelled by Bartholdi, the same artist who designed the statue of Liberty on Bedlow's Island.

POPPIE.—1. No particular harm, but as you find it is noticed, avoid smiling at the young gentleman as much as you can. 2. A little alterative medicine. 3. Give him a clear case if he smokes, or a necktie or pair of gloves if he does not.

R. B. B.—The Roman pins were usually of bronze, but were sometimes made of ivory, bone, or wood. The pins mentioned in the Bible for fastening hangings were of metal. Back pins for use with black dresses are prepared by japanning the common brass pins.

T. H. S.—Ribbons and other silks should be put away for preservation in brown paper; the chloride of lime used in manufacturing white paper frequently producing discoloration. A white satin dress should be pinned in blue paper, with brown paper outside, and sewed together at the edges.

KODIA.—1. It is injurious and we decline to advise you to use it. 2. Get an ordinary curling stick; borax is the chief ingredient and is harmless. 3. Always employ soap and water after every meal, before breakfast and after supper. 4. Either shade would suit. 5. She may go properly christened.

M. T. L.—1. Answered last week. 2. Anyone who deals in facts rather than romance and imagination and is blessed with common sense. 3. The word only means "rapid" or "quick." 4. We will search them out for you. The last is the name of a well-known Scotch ballad.

S. T. S.—You do not love your sister overmuch or you could not see his faults and your own superiority so plainly. You are too young any way to feel deep or lasting devotion. The man is no match for you or any girl if he is "poor, uneducated, lazy, and has no trade," dismiss him.

C. S. L.—The advertised complexion mask is probably harmless, but you can whiten and soften your skin quite as well without paying £1 for a mask. Bathe at night in bran and warm water and apply a mask of white flannel anointed on the inside with white of egg well beaten up with a little powdered alum and lemon juice with a spoonful of milk or cream.

E. L. D.—"Befana," in Italy, is a puppet or doll dressed as a woman, and carried through the streets in procession on the day of the Epiphany (twelfth day after Christmas), and on some other feast days. The name is thought to be derived from "Epiphania," the feast of the Epiphany. On the day of this feast presents are given to children in Italy, as they are elsewhere on Christmas or New Year's, and the "Befana" is supposed to bring them.

P. A.—Bergamo is the name of a variety of pear, which, like the citron tree of the same name, is said to have originated in Bergamo, Italy. The word is also used to designate a coarse tapestry, supposed to have been invented at Bergamo.

G. W. S.—Most of the cardinals in France refused to attend the marriage of Napoleon I. to Maria Louise, as the Pope had not ratified the divorce from Josephine, and they were banished from the capital and forbidden to wear their aristocratic gowns; hence, they were called "black cardinals."

WALTER WICK.—After Napoleon I.'s death, in 1821, Maria Louise contracted a morganatic marriage with Count Albert Adam von Neipperg, an Austrian general, then in his 47th year, who had been her chamberlain in 1815. She bore him several children. He died on April 22, 1839. Her death took place at Vienna on December 19, 1841.

H. A. A.—To remove dark stains from silver, pour a little sulphuric acid into a saucer, wet with it a soft linen rag, and rub it on the article until the discoloration disappears. Then coat the article with whiting finely powdered and sifted and mixed with spirits of wine. When the whiting has dried on thoroughly, wipe it off with a silk handkerchief, and polish the silver briskly with soft buckskin.

D. T. T.—The barrel, as a measure of capacity, is of variable dimensions, differing in size in different countries, and with the material it is designed to hold. The English measures are 31½ gallons for a barrel of wine, 32 for ale, and 36 for beer. In the United States the barrel for wine, beer, and cider is 31½ gallons. The lamp-oil barrel of Cincinnati contains 45 gallons. The whiskey barrel usually contains 40 to 45 gallons.

LIFE'S SPRING-TIDE.

Oh, Youth! Fair Spring-tide of the heart,

What wondrous joys are thine!

What founts of gladness for thee start—

What glories for thee shine!

O'er thee the sun is bright and high,

And clear the soft, expanding sky;

While Earth her charms has multiplied,

And Pleasure smiles on every side;

And thus pass on thy halcyon hours

With Time's keen eye unweary'd with flowers!

And yet this is the day, Oh, Youth,

When in thy many years,

Life's course shows the jewel Truth,

Should find a fitting place!

If then on this your work is built—

A life unmarred by aught of guilt—

An after-time will praise thy deeds,

And bless the righteous way that leads

To Virtue's fair and holy heights—

To pleasures pure and sweet delights!

Thy heart, Oh, Youth, cannot evade

Experience of years!

Alas, perchance thou wilt be made

The nursery of tears!

O, happy is the smile of peace,

Its joys each new year shall increase

And blessings fresh and sweet shall fall,

Until to crown with beauty all,

New feelings thrill the joyful breast,

With Love the first, the chief, the best!

W. B. D.

DORA.—Yes, we certainly think a girl with yellow hair, blue eyes, pink cheeks, and white teeth merits the epithet pretty, though we are by no means so clear about a girl of fifteen being in love. No doubt she thinks she is. Few girls of that age do not; but, indeed, Dora, the feeling of this spring-time is as different to real love "as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine." When at last real love comes to you you will not need to seek anything about it, you will find it altogether self-evident.

L. D.—Sweden and Norway form a single kingdom, but have separate internal administrations, the king residing alternately in each country. During the absence of the king in Norway, Sweden is governed by a regency named by him, consisting of a prince of the blood or a minister of state and three councillors. In case of his absence in a foreign country, or of the minority of the sovereign, the two kingdoms are governed by a joint regency consisting of ten Swedes and ten Norwegians. The law-making power is vested in a legislature called the Diet, but the king has the right of absolute veto of any measure passed by it. There are throughout the kingdom petty courts, of which the clergy are often magistrates. The king must be a member of the Lutheran church.

C. H. S.—1. Antonio Stradivari, the Italian violin maker, was born in Cremona in 1644, and died there on Dec. 17, 1737. He was the first to finish his violins neatly on the inside. He generally selected and cut his wood with great care, and studied the proportions of thickness and breadth most conducive to sonority, and the lustre and durability of his varnish. As early as 1668 he began to use a label with his own name. Some of his famous instruments were owned by the late G. and Duke of Tuscany, and several were in the collections of Mr. Joseph Gillet in England. Superior specimens have from time to time commanded prices ranging from £200 to £2000; but quite recently one brought in Paris £2000. It was bought by M. Julien Huet. 2. We will send biographical sketches of Stradivari and other violin makers, as well as articles on the violin, in the standard encyclopaedia.

N. N. O.—Your writing might be plainer with advantage, and from it we judge you care more for grace than strength.

AN IRISH GIRL.—Concealment is always bad in such cases. However, under the circumstances, you have not done anything very wrong. You ought to pay your lover to acknowledge your engagement openly at least six months before the wedding. You write a nice hand.

R. M.—Alum pastilles have been much used in broken chilblains, chaps, and chronic inflammation of the eye, and often prove very efficacious. To make them, take of alum, in fine powder, one drachm avoirdupois, and the whites of two eggs, and shake them together until they congeal. Spread on fine linen, and cover with a piece of fine muslin.

L. D. D.—James K. Paulding, in conjunction with his brother-in-law, William Irving, and with Washington Irving, produced the series of "Salmagundi" papers, which terminated with the twentieth number, June 25, 1839; and as no division of the contributions was attempted, they were afterwards incorporated in Washington Irving's works.

D. N. M.—The awful hurricane on the west coast of England and in Ireland, to which you refer, occurred on Jan. 6-7, 1839. The storm raged through Cheshire, Staffordshire, and Warwickshire. Twenty persons were killed in Liverpool by the falling of buildings, and 100 were drowned in the neighbourhood. The coast and harbours were covered with wrecks, the value of two of the vessels lost being nearly £200,000. In Limerick, Galway, Athlone, and other places, more than 200 houses were blown down, and as many more were burned, the wind spreading the fire. Dublin suffered various casualties. London and its neighbourhood scarcely sustained any damage.

C. W. Tall, handsome, with light hair and brown eyes, said to look like Mary Anderson, and with a pretty talent for amateur acting, wishes to become a professional, and asks where she can be trained in the art of acting free. We answer we do not know. There are schools for such instruction, but they all require considerable fees. Her best plan will be to see some manager, and let him judge of her talent. If it be as considerable, as she evidently thinks it, she may easily get subordinate parts from which she can risk, with time and study to the very highest place. Yet a stage career is at best a hard one, and for such success there are a hundred failures.

L. E. A.—The body of President Lincoln, of the United States, was taken on Oct. 9, 1874, from an iron coffin, put into a lead one, and soldered air-tight; then into a wooden one made of narrow strips of red cedar, and all were then put into the marble sarcophagus in the catacomb of the monument at Springfield, Illinois, which was dedicated on Oct. 15, 1874. The attempt to steal the body was made on the evening of Nov. 7, 1876. The would-be robbers removed the lid and end piece of the sarcophagus next to the door, and drew the wooden and lead coffins, with the body enclosed, nearly out when they were disturbed by an officer of the United States Secret Service. After the escape of the thieves, the sarcophagus was re-enclosed and made perfectly secure.

W. H. asks if there ever was a Jack Horner, or is the "Mother Goose" rhyme just pure nonsense, which says:

"Little Jack Horner

Sat in a corner

Eating his Christmas pie.

He picked out a plum

With his finger and thumb,

And said: 'What a good boy am I!'

Like many of the "Mother Goose" so-called nonsense verses this has reference to a bit of history, or rather tradition. The Abbot of Glastonbury was so rich and powerful that King Henry VIII. was warned against him. The king was indignant when he heard of the abbot having built a kitchen which he boasted was as fine as some of Henry's palaces. To appease his wrath the abbot sent the king a Christmas pie. Inside the flaky, brown crust were the little heads of twelve monks—a splendid gift. The abbot sent it by his steward, Jack Horner. Jack lifted up the corner of the pie-crust and abstracted the head of the Manor of Wells. He was found out, but forgiven, and long after "Mother Goose" immortalised him in her "Nursery Rhymes."

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